

DIXON HAWKES

CASE BOOK
No 20

2/6

THRILLING
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STORIES





DIXON HAWKE'S CASE BOOK

No. 20

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Gala Night

THE Wellingtree Arts Club was enjoying the highlight of its season's activities.

Founded, according to its rules and regulations, for "the welfare, promotion and encouragement of all forms of artistic and literary culture," it had already, during this third year of its existence, been responsible for lectures on sculpture, painting, Egyptology and ancient Greek myths. It had devoted evenings to the dramatic works of Shake-

speare, Bernard Shaw and Christopher Fry.

From all of which it will be rightly assumed that the tone of the Wellingtree Arts Club was frightfully superior. Its membership, consequently, was confined very largely to the upper stratum of society which, if not containing within itself a high proportion of intelligentsia, could rate its subscription large enough to cover its considerable expenses.

Tonight, at the last meeting of the present season—held, as had

A Lesson For a Lady

been all the others, in the Civic Hall—the lecturer was no less distinguished a person than Isidor Stenzky, the great film producer, whose subject was "The Contribution of the Cinema to Modern Culture." He had drawn on this occasion the largest of audiences.

On the platform was the lecturer—definitely a personality, bearded, dark-eyed and dynamic. To his left was the Very Rev. Eusebius Mainbrace, D.D., the well-respected Dean of Wellintree, whilst on his right sat Lady Diana Dayton, one of the founders of the Arts Club. For the third successive time she had been elected its president.

Lady Diana was an exceedingly beautiful and attractive young woman who, until not so long ago, had herself been a successful film actress. Her forsaking of the arc lights in order to marry Lord Dayton, who at the age of sixty-four had been thirty years a widower, created quite a minor sensation.

It was rumoured, however, that within six months of the marriage the clashing of temperaments and of mutual interests had set the knowledgeable shaking their heads seriously. There were those who maintained that Lord Dayton was inclined to be miserly, and that he had no leanings towards literature or the arts, being fully occupied with politics and sport. Under these circumstances, it was considered in certain circles that the lovely Diana had paid a rather heavy price for her title and the place it brought her in society.

Little of this was evident now, though, as she leaned forward, her

shapely chin cupped in one hand, her elbow resting upon the table in front of her, listening with apparent intensity to the inspired eloquence of Isidor Stenzky. With the other hand she toyed with the pendant of diamonds which hung about her neck—a wedding present from her noble husband, and known to be valued at somewhere about eight thousand pounds.

Her habit of wearing expensive jewellery on all and sundry occasions had several times brought forth admonitions from Lord Dayton, who had told her curtly that she was making herself a target for "crooks and gentry of that sort." He had also warned her not to expect him to make good any losses she might sustain as the result of her love of display. This she had lightly countered with the declaration that jewels were meant to be worn and not hidden away in stuffy safes.

Isidor Stenzky was warming up to his subject when he suddenly paused dramatically and took a long gulp of water from the glass standing on the table before him. Then, while his audience hung expectantly on his next words, he deliberately refilled the glass from the carafe beside it. Once that operation was completed he continued his discourse.

Halfway down the hall a young man put one hand to his mouth, and under cover of that hand remarked sotto voce to his lean-featured, keen-eyed companion, "Affected blighter, ain't he, Guv'nor?"

Dixon Hawke, the world-renowned private detective, half-

The drama of the disappearing diamonds

smiled as he glanced sideways at his youthful assistant.

"Feeling bored, Tommy?"

Tommy Burke shrugged.

"I've listened to worse," he admitted, in a confidential whisper. "Bloke knows what he's talking about, all right, but he thinks a heck of a lot of himself, though. The way he took that drink of water was just playing to the gallery!"

"These fellows can never forget to act," replied Hawke. "That's the trouble."

He lapsed into silence as several heads were turned rather indignantly in their direction.

The two detectives were attending the lecture at the invitation of Colonel Chilcott, the Chief Constable of the district, on whose behalf Dixon Hawke was visiting Wellingtree, in order to give evidence at an Assize case. Colonel Chilcott was a member of the Arts Club, but, unable to go that evening, and knowing that Dixon Hawke and his assistant were staying in the town overnight, he had offered them his tickets.

Hawke Takes Over

ISIDOR STENZKY, still holding the audience in the palm of his hand, posed dramatically.

"The challenge is ours," he declared, "and we must either take it up or allow the trust reposed in us by civilisation to be betrayed. We can order the culture of the modern world by means of the tremendous power which the cinema wields in the moulding of thought and of the way of life. Or we can——"

Without so much as a flicker of warning, all the lights in the hall went out, plunging the place into total darkness.

There were loud murmurs of consternation, mingled with the sounds of people shuffling in their seats, and of feet rushing to and fro to deal with this unexpected situation. Then, over the increasing buzz of excitement, one voice rang out with a startling clarity—a woman's voice, high-pitched and filled with alarm—

"My diamonds! They're gone—they've been stolen!"

It was unmistakably the voice of Lady Diana Dayton, and at once pandemonium broke loose. Dixon Hawke, who had so far remained seated, quietly calm and imperturbable, now tensed and sprang to his feet. Making a megaphone of his two hands, he shouted in stentorian tones—

"Silence, please!"

Instantly the uproar died down, and before it could recommence the detective went on firmly and authoritatively—

"I am a police official. Somebody kindly stand at the doors, and make sure no one leaves this room!"

Lights began to come on as gas jets, with which the hall had been provided against just such an emergency, were lit one by one. Then, amid the general clamour which had once more broken out, but was now somewhat more restrained, Dixon Hawke left his place and strode down the gangway towards the platform, which he ascended by means of a short flight of steps placed at one side.

A Lesson For a Lady

There he came face to face with Isidor Stenzky, looking utterly bewildered; the Rev. Dr Mainbrace, whose expression was one of helpless distress; and Lady Diana Dayton, pale and trembling, one hand clutching her throat, from which had disappeared the glittering diamond pendant that had adorned it but a few minutes before.

Hawke went straight up to the Dean of Wellington, and handed him his official warrant-card, endorsed by the Assistant Commissioner (C) of New Scotland Yard, specially granted to him in recognition of his co-operation with the Metropolitan Police. A few words were interchanged, then the Dean faced the audience and raised one hand for silence.

"My friends," he said, in slightly unsteady voice, "it seems that an audacious crime has just been committed in our very midst, and that our worthy president, Lady Dayton, has actually been robbed of a very valuable diamond pendant which she was wearing. This gentleman"—he gestured towards Dixon Hawke standing beside him—"is a well-known detective of some considerable standing in police circles, whom we are fortunate enough to have with us. I think it would be as well if he assumed charge of this case until the appropriate authority arrives."

Dr Mainbrace looked at Dixon Hawke, who nodded and took a step forward. The audience regarded him breathlessly—this was a sensation for which they were quite prepared to forgo all the remainder of Isidor Stenzky's eloquence on behalf of highbrow films!

"Ladies and gentlemen," began the detective, "I regret that the enjoyment of the evening should be marred by an incident of this nature, but you will all realise, I am sure, that what has occurred is a crime of some magnitude, and demands the fullest investigation. As you are all aware, Lady Dayton has been robbed of some valuable jewellery, and there seems no doubt that the crime was carefully premeditated."

"I notice"—Hawke swept the room with his gaze—"that my request for the doors to be guarded has been complied with. I take it that no one has left this hall since the lights went out? We shall have to work on that assumption, at any rate. There is no need for me to point out that anyone who attempted to leave before the police have made their inquiries would be laying himself, or herself, open to suspicion."

"I am going to ask my assistant," went on the detective, as his audience still sat silent and obviously uneasy before him, "to go at once to the police headquarters, which, as you know, are only a few doors from this hall, and report the affair to Chief Inspector Curry, who will, on his arrival, take charge of the case."

"Until he comes, I trust you will offer me every co-operation by carrying out my instructions, whatever they may be. The Dean of Wellington mentioned my qualifications, but did not give my name—which happens to be Dixon Hawke."

There was a concerted gasp at this—proof positive of the fact that the famous criminologist's name and reputation were known to a good

Who was the mysterious thief who worked in the dark?

many of those present. All eyes were turned to watch Tommy Burke as he left his own seat and went quickly from the hall. Dixon Hawke crossed over and spoke to Lady Diana, who was still looking white and shaken as the result of her unenviable experience.

"Now, Lady Dayton," he said quietly, "will you tell me, please, exactly what happened?"

She hesitated a second, then blurted out—

"I—I'm not quite sure myself. I was so startled when all the lights went out suddenly, then a—a hand touched my neck, and the next thing I knew was that my diamonds were gone. It—it was awful," she shuddered, "and I was horribly scared!"

"I can quite understand that," Hawke agreed sympathetically. "Did the thief unfasten the clasp, or was the pendant wrenched forcibly from your neck?"

"I felt the chain snap as he dragged it off."

"You're sure it was a man, then?"

"Oh, I—I think so—yes, I'm almost sure it was. Of course, I couldn't see, you know."

"No, naturally." Hawke stroked his chin thoughtfully. "How long would you say elapsed between the time the lights went out and the touch of that hand at your neck?"

"I suppose you could have counted ten," she replied. "It all happened so quickly, it's hard to be certain on any point—except that the diamonds are gone!" she added, with a rueful little smile.

"About ten seconds? H'm, that

would seem to indicate that the thief didn't have to move far to reach the platform—must have been in one of the front rows."

The detective's gaze roved over the audience, now engaged in mutual speculation and agitated discussion. He was searching for anyone present whom he might recognise as a "listed" man—one of the expert jewel thieves or confidence tricksters known to the police and Scotland Yard. But, excellently trained though his memory was, it could recall no suspicious character. Everyone he saw looked harmless enough.

"Did the thief pass behind you or in front of you?" he next asked. "You saw nothing that might give us the smallest clue to his identity?"

"Nothing whatever, Mr Hawke. He must have passed behind me, otherwise I am positive I would have known it."

Dr Mainbrace broke in with—

"Really, this is most appalling. To think that such a thing could have taken place here, amongst such a highly respectable gathering."

Dixon Hawke smiled grimly.

"The perfect cover for what somebody hopes will prove the perfect crime. One thing is quite clear—there were two or more persons involved, since one was required to tamper with the lights while the other committed the actual theft.

"It will be interesting to know how the failure of the lights was caused. I don't think it could have been done from the mains, otherwise the lights would have been switched on again by now. My

A Lesson For a Lady

guess is that the thief's accomplice cut the wiring at some point, but we'll find out about that later. Ah!"—as there was a commotion at the far end of the hall—"here's the Chief Inspector—now he can take over."

The Carafe Clue

CHIEF INSPECTOR CURRY had entered, accompanied by a sergeant and a uniformed constable, with Tommy Burke bringing up the rear. Curry himself made for the platform, leaving the others standing by the door in a little group. He greeted Hawke with a friendly nod, having, indeed, parted from him only a few hours previously after a chat at the local police station.

"Another spot of trouble, eh, Mr Hawke?" The Chief Inspector acknowledged the three other occupants of the platform, and was soon in possession of the main features of the case.

"It seems to me," he said, "that somebody must have known Lady Dayton would wear the pendant this evening. And that"—he turned to the girl—"would suggest someone in fairly close contact with your Ladyship. Did you mention to anyone that you would be wearing it? Your maid would have known, of course."

"Good gracious!" Lady Diana's face registered amazement and indignation. "You're not suggesting—"

Curry shrugged.

"I've got to consider every angle, my Lady. As somebody has cer-

tainly gone to quite a lot of trouble to pull off this coup, he must have known what he was after from the start."

"As a matter of fact," said the girl a trifle coldly, "I'm used to wearing jewellery when I go out, and lots of people know it. If you're going to suspect them all—"

"It's part of my job to suspect everybody, whoever they are," retorted the Chief Inspector stolidly. "Some of the worst crooks I've known looked as respectable as the Archbishop of Canterbury—or—er—sorry, sir, no offence intended!"

This last remark was made to the Dean of Wellington, whose brows had risen in mild disapproval. Isidor Stenzky frowned.

"Look here!" he exclaimed. "I hope you're not thinking that my respectability is a cloak for criminal activities, Inspector?"

"Chief Inspector," corrected Curry calmly. "My dear sir, nobody need worry about us if his conscience is clear." Turning to Dixon Hawke, he queried, "D'you reckon the thief's still in the hall?"

The private detective nodded.

"I don't think anyone had much chance to get away from the moment the alarm was raised. He may have been smart enough to manage it, though. On the other hand—"

"Okay!" Curry infused a new note of authority into his voice. "There's only one thing to be done—search everybody here."

"But, good gracious!" The Rev. Dr Mainbrace uttered an ejaculation of horror. "You—you don't mean that, surely?"

The underwater camouflage trick

"Why not? It's ninety-nine chances to a hundred those diamonds are still in the room, tucked away neatly in someone's pocket. Whether or not, we've got to make sure, and there's no other way. Shall you tell them"—he gestured towards the audience—"or shall I?"

"Oh, dear! I—I think perhaps it would be better if you did so, Chief Inspector."

"Right." Curry rapped loudly on the top of the table with his fist, then swung round to confront the sea of upturned faces. "Ladies and gentlemen, this is going to be a very unpleasant business for you all, and, believe me, it's just as unpleasant for me. But I've got my duty to perform, as you'll all understand. So I hope no one will take offence at what I'm going to say."

He paused for a moment, then continued—

"I have to satisfy myself that the missing diamonds are not in the possession of any person here present. For that purpose, then, I have no alternative but to ask you all to submit to being searched."

There was a loud outburst of protest, but the police official raised a hand, and continued firmly above the sound of the angry voices—

"I'm sorry, as I've said before—but it's absolute necessary. I will be as considerate as I possibly can, and the search will be conducted privately and speedily."

"As things are, every man and woman here must be suspect, and it will be of advantage to all save the guilty person to have themselves cleared of any complicity."

"Just a minute, Chief Inspector!"

Into Curry's little speech the voice of Dixon Hawke inserted itself. The eyes of the celebrated Dover Street detective were gleaming with a strange light, and the expression on his lean features was one which his young assistant, Tommy Burke, had learned to interpret as the prelude to what the newspapers called a "startling development."

"Yes. What is it?" asked Curry.

"I think," said Dixon Hawke, clearly and distinctly, "that I can find those diamonds without putting you to all that trouble. Allow me."

He stepped up to the table amid a sudden silence that could almost be felt.

Then, under the intently curious gaze of over three hundred pairs of eyes, he reached out for the water carafe, up-ended it so that the water emptied itself out upon the floor, then shook it over his open palm. Something rattled out, and he held it up for all to see. It was a glittering diamond pendant!

Cries of surprise broke out.

"How the dickens—?" Gasping, Curry fell back, his jaw sagging.

Dixon Hawke replaced the carafe on the table.

"A little while ago, while Mr Isidor Stenzky was delivering his lecture," the detective stated, "he poured water from that carafe into a glass. I noticed at the time the level of the water remaining in the carafe."

"A moment or two ago while you were speaking, Chief Inspector, I happened to observe that the level of the water had risen. That could

A Lesson For a Lady

only mean that something had been dropped into the carafe, forcing the water content higher.

"Immediately I thought of the diamonds, which, being glass-like, would not be visible in the water. It was a cunningly ingenious hiding-place, allowing the thief to be searched without incurring the slightest risk. As it is—well, there they are—safe and sound!"

Lady Diana Dayton was staring at her pendant as though she could not believe what had happened.

"Well, I'm blown!" was Chief Inspector Curry's amazed comment. "You've not earned your reputation for nothing, Mr Hawke. But that still doesn't tell us who stole the confounded things."

Dixon Hawke was staring pensively into the middle distance, and answered—

"Find out who monkeyed with the lights and you'll solve your problem. But I'm afraid you'll discover that the wiring was snipped at some vulnerable point, and the instrument which did the job was thrown away. That leaves you three hundred people to choose from, and I don't envy you your job. But, perhaps, under the circumstances——"

He transferred his gaze to where Lady Dayton stood, adjusting the pendant once more about her neck.

"You mean, she won't bother about pressing the case?"

"Why should she?" Hawke shrugged. "She's got her diamonds back, and this may teach her to be more careful in future."

Two days later, in the privacy of her boudoir, Lady Diana Dayton

sat re-reading for the twentieth time, the letter she held in her hands. It ran:—

"Dear Lady Diana,—Why did you plan, in so ingenious a manner, to 'steal' your own diamonds? My guess is that you were very short of money and hoped to cash in on the insurance.

"Of course, nobody ever crept up under cover of darkness and took the pendant from about your neck. You simply unfastened it yourself and dropped it into the water carafe, where you hoped it would remain until after the preliminary hue-and-cry was over. Then you (or someone else) would retrieve it. Maybe you even hoped, after collecting the insurance money, to sell it, and so reap a double benefit.

"I don't know who your accomplice was in this undoubtedly neat little scheme, but I have since learned that your brother was amongst the audience that evening. Perhaps he originated the idea, as well as helping to carry it out?"

"How do I know the diamonds were not really stolen?"

"Well, when I announced that I knew where they were, I happened to be looking at you, and I saw your eyes go immediately and instinctively to the water carafe. In that instant, I realised that you, also, knew where they were—because you had put them there!"

"It was bad luck for you that your plans should have gone astray, but, really, you know, insurance companies have their rights, and cannot be defrauded with impunity. —"Yours very faithfully, Dixon Hawke."

DAMSEL DOUBLECROSS



A Shock For a Playboy

FRANCINE VALOISE was an exceptionally fascinating young woman who had turned the heads of a good many men during the latter part of her twenty-two years. Latest of her conquests was Leslie Pomfroy, son of Lord Justice Pomfroy, the eminent Judge.

To say that Leslie was absolutely infatuated with this undeniably beautiful, vitally attractive French girl was a mild understatement. He was just crazy about her. As he could afford to indulge all her changing whims and fancies, his infatuation was tolerated, and even

responded to with every outward show of endearment.

This afternoon, as she sat close to him on the divan in her well-appointed flat in Half Moon Street, he made a desperate plea.

"Why can't you come with me tonight, Francine?" he begged. "We haven't been dancing for over a week now."

She looked up at him with her large, lustrous brown eyes.

"But, chérie, it is my friend—

Damsel Doublecross

la pauvre Dorette—she is still so verree ill, I mus' go an' sit with her, so that her mother may go out, yes?"

The young man frowned.

"That's what you told me last week when I wanted to take you to Claro's."

"Mais, oui," she nodded. "I go each week. You do not mind, no?" She nestled her perfect platinum head against his shoulder and stroked his cheek gently. "It is—how do you say—my turn tonight, n'est-ce-pas? I am so verree sorry, Leslee."

"But surely she could have a nurse in? Can't she afford it?"

Francine shrugged shapely shoulders.

"Dorette, she do not like to 'ave strangers, so her mother, she nurse her. But eet is such hard work, so I go one evening jus' to help her out, that she may rest. You do not mind, Leslee?"

"Leslee" did mind, and his disappointment was plainly visible on his handsome features. But, as usual, he gave in to her and nodded dully.

"Very well, if that's how you want it, my dear, I suppose you must go." He gripped her arm suddenly, very tightly. "But it is true, isn't it—what you say? I mean, there isn't anyone else—another man?" His eyes gleamed with smouldering passion. "If I thought there was, I—I'd kill him, and you as well!"

She laughed, and, releasing herself from his embrace, clapped her two hands together.

"Oh, la-la! You are so jealous,

my Leslee. Eet is funny. There is no other man, I assure you. I am just for you alone, truly. Now kiss me and do not be stupid any more—darling!"

His enslavement was complete. An instant later he was profuse in apologies, his words tumbling over one another in his effort to atone for his suspicions.

He believed her—he trusted her implicitly.

Which was all the more reason why he sat, pale and stunned, behind his newspaper in the smoking-room of his club two mornings later.

A couple of his fellow club members—named Messiter and Dawes—were talking a few feet away from him. There was nothing confidential about their conversation, which was carried on in normal tones.

"Don't see so much of old Fotherdew these days, do we?" remarked Messiter.

His companion chuckled knowingly.

"Wouldn't expect to, old man. He's found much more interesting company than ours."

"You mean a woman?" Messiter's eyebrows rose. "Good life! I didn't think Fotherdew was a lady's man."

"Neither did I," replied Dawes, "but you never can tell with these quiet blokes. Anyway, he knows how to pick them. This one's certainly got what it takes."

"You've seen her, then?"

"Saw them both together the other day, but old Fothy didn't know he'd been spotted. The chap I was with seemed to know some-

Poison pay-off for the fascinating Francine

thing about her, though, and he told me. It appears she's a little French dame, with a flat in Half Moon Street. And, believe me, Messiter, she's a smasher all right!"

It was then that Leslie Pomfroy, who until that moment had been idly perusing the political news, jerked himself upright, his whole frame stiff with tension, and his eyes alert. He managed to retain his grip on the newspaper, however, and what he heard under cover of it during the next few minutes convinced him that Dawes was not talking through his hat. The latter, repeating with confidence what had been told him, left no doubt in Leslie's mind on one point—

Francine was two-timing him!

Francine—who had vowed there was no other man in her life!

Francine — and Roger Fother-dew—

And, perhaps, others—

Leslie Pomfroy stood up suddenly, crushed the newspaper into a ball between his fingers, and went unsteadily from the room, his face the colour of cigarette ash. As he passed them on his way out, the two other men stared after him.

"Great Scot!" exclaimed Messiter. "What the deuce is wrong with Pomfroy? Looks as though he'd been suddenly taken ill. I hope it's nothing serious."

Leslie Pomfroy spent the next couple of hours wandering dazedly from bar to bar and becoming gloriously drunk. Then he made his way to the flat in Half Moon Street.

Francine was not at home. As a matter of fact, at that very moment

she was lunching at Chorley Wood with a Herefordshire business man whose name was Bliss—a name which doubtless reflected his mood.

Scribble Betrayal

THIRTY-SIX hours or so later Dixon Hawke, the ace private detective, with Tommy Burke, his bright young assistant, and Detective-Inspector Baxter, Chief of the Flying Squad, stood looking down on the dead and distorted body of the once lovely Francine Valoise.

A few paces from them, Simms, the janitor of the Half Moon Street flats, looked on with pale, half-scared features. In the background hovered the usual group of Yard men, awaiting orders to proceed with the routine work applicable to all murder cases.

A police doctor had just finished his preliminary examination, and looked up with a shrug.

"Poison, of course," he announced laconically. "Almost definitely arsenic, in some strength, I'd say. Not a very nice finish, either," he went on, standing up and dusting his trouser knees. "It probably took her half an hour to die, most of it pretty painful!"

Francine Valoise lay sprawled on the floor, her features twisted from the throes of her death spasm, one arm beneath her and the other flung out above her head. In the fingers of the outstretched hand a pencil was clutched.

Inspector Baxter beckoned to the janitor.

"Now, then, my man, pull yourself together," he said, not unkindly,

Damsel Doublecross

"and tell us what you know about this. It was you who phoned for the police, wasn't it?"

Simms took a couple of halting paces forward and nodded.

"Y-yes, sir. It was about an hour ago. I was in my pantry downstairs, that's just underneath this room, and I was just turnin' the light out before goin' off to bed——"

Baxter glanced at his watch.

"H'm. It's now ten past two. That means it was about one a.m. You keep late hours, don't you?"

"Not always, sir," was the reply.

"But Colonel Hempstall—he's got the top flat in the 'ouse—tips me 'andsomely to wait up for 'im when he 'as 'is nights out. You see, sir, 'e often comes back a bit—er—well—er——"

"One over the eight, and likes you to be handy to tuck him in, eh?" supplied Baxter.

"Yes, you've 'it it, sir. Well, like I was sayin', I'd seen the colonel safely up to 'is rooms a few minutes before, and was just ready to turn in meself, when I 'eard a funny noise on the ceilin' of me pantry—that'd be the floor of this room, sir. It sounded like a 'eavy bump and someone kicking with their 'eels.

"I knew the young Frenchwoman 'ad this flat, and I wondered what on earth could be 'appenin'. I thought p'raps she'd been taken ill sudden-like, so I comes up to see if I can do anythin'. When I knocks on 'er door, I gets no answer, although the light was on in the room. I opens the door, and then—I sees that——"

Simms ended his lengthy explana-

tion by pointing a shaking finger at the ominously still form lying on the floor. He shuddered and turned swiftly away.

The Scotland Yard official looked across at Dixon Hawke, who had moved over to the table in the centre of the room, and was gazing down at something. The table was laid with a white cloth, and held a vase of flowers and a bowl of fruit—apples, grapes and oranges. A place had been set for one with cup, saucer and plate, knife and fork, all unused.

"All ready for her breakfast in the morning, I suppose," said Baxter.

"I daresay," agreed the Dover Street detective. "But what holds my attention is this." He indicated some pencilled lettering standing out clearly visible upon the white background of the tablecloth. "What do you make of that, Baxter?"

The Inspector stared at the writing. It was brief, consisting of but six letters, thus—

Les pom

"By Jove!" Baxter transferred his gaze to the prostrate body, noting with a new significance the pencil clasped in one hand. "She—she wrote that herself when she was dying—the writing's all straggly and uneven. She was trying to tell us——"

"The name of the man who killed her!" Tommy Burke had joined the two men at the table, and finished the Inspector's sentence



Inspector Baxter had been questioning the janitor of the flats until Hawke drew his attention to the mysterious message scrawled in pencil on the tablecloth.

Damsel Doublecross

with bated breath. "That's it, sure enough, Guvnor. Leslie somebody."

Baxter swung round on the janitor.

"Do you know anything about this young woman's private life? Don't worry!" he went on quickly, noting the other's fleeting look of indignation. "I'm not suggesting you're a snooper, but it's possible you got to know her friends—folk who visited her from time to time. Was there anyone named Leslie?"

Simms scratched his head.

"She was an attractive girl, sir, and, of course, she 'ad quite a few men friends. Now, let me see, Leslie——" The man considered a moment or two, then said—"That might be Mr Pomfroy, sir—I think 'is name was Leslie."

"Gosh, that's it, Guv'nor!" burst out Tommy. "'Les Pom,' but she didn't have time to finish writing his name. It's as plain as a pike-staff that's your man."

Dixon Hawke rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"Pomfroy — Pomfroy?" he meditated aloud. "Come to think of it, that may be the son of Lord Justice Pomfroy. Good grief!"

The Inspector looked at the janitor.

"D'you know, Simms, whether this Mr Pomfroy called on Miss Valoise tonight?"

Simms breathed deeply.

"As a matter of fact, 'e did, sir. 'E came 'ere twice—once at about 'alf-past nine, but the young lady wasn't 'ome then. So 'e came again at eleven o'clock, just after she'd got back. 'E passed my door each

time on 'is way up and, o' course, I knew 'im, because 'e's often been 'ere before.

"'E came yesterday, too, just before lunch, and 'e was tight as a drum then. But I think 'e was sober all right tonight."

"I see. And do you happen to know what time he left?"

"It might 'ave been about 'alf-past twelve, I s'pose."

"And half an hour later she was dead — from poisoning!" The Inspector shrugged. "Well, looks as if you're right, Tommy. All we want to find out now is the motive for the crime, and how he did it. What's your opinion, doctor? Could she have lived for half an hour after taking the stuff?"

"Depends on the solution of the poison used," was the answer. "She could have done so, or, had the poison been used in a more concentrated form, death could have occurred within five minutes. We'll know more about that after the post-mortem."

"Any idea how it might have been administered?"

"Probably in a drink. Anything with a gin basis, for instance, would have concealed the taste."

"Drinks, eh?" Baxter grunted, and at once started a systematic search for evidence in this direction, in which he was joined by Tommy Burke. They were too occupied with their task to notice Dixon Hawke stiffen suddenly in one corner of the room, stoop, pick something up from the floor, and slip it into his pocket.

A minute or two later Tommy, who had disappeared into a small

The janitor's incriminating evidence

adjoining kitchenette, was heard to give a shout.

"Hi, Inspector, just a tick! How's this?"

Baxter joined Hawke's young assistant, and the latter showed him two glasses upended on the draining-board of the sink. They appeared to have been washed quite recently, for each was still slightly damp. The Yard man regarded them speculatively.

"Huh! I begin to see it now," he murmured. "Pomfroy dopes her drink, then, knowing it'll be some time before the stuff takes effect, he suggests, probably jokingly, that they wash up the glasses, so's not to leave anything untidy for the morning. Quite a cute move, that."

He picked up both glasses carefully, using his handkerchief to do so.

"I'll take these along and have them tested for finger-prints."

Further search brought to light various sorts of drink, including gin, in a sideboard cupboard in the room where the body lay. Baxter's eyes glinted at this further corroborative evidence of his theory.

Dixon Hawke had remained for some time standing once more by the table, and he seemed to be very deep in thought. Now, however, he swung round.

"I think I'll be getting back to Dover Street," he said quietly. "But if you'd care to look in some time after lunch tomorrow—or, rather, today—I may have something of significance to give you, Baxter."

The Inspector threw him a swift glance.

"Such as——"

But Hawke would say nothing more.

"See me later," he replied. "Come along, Tommy."

The Postmark Clue

WHEN Inspector Baxter did call on Dixon Hawke during the afternoon of that same day, he was looking exceedingly pleased with himself. He plumped down into his favourite armchair near the fireplace with a sigh of satisfaction.

"Well, Hawke," he said, "we've just about got this case in the bag. Pomfroy did it right enough. I've checked up on him, and I've discovered his motive."

"Really?" queried the private detective. "And what was that?"

"The oldest motive for crime in the world—jealousy. It seems Pomfroy was dead nuts on this French girl, and he found out she was two-timing him. From what I've been able to uncover so far, she actually had three or four different men on her string at the time of her death."

Tommy Burke interrupted with a whistle and the remark—

"Whew! She went in for her two-timing in a big way, didn't she?"

"Unscrupulous little gold-digger, if you ask me," grunted the Inspector. "If anyone was asking for trouble, she was. However, I had a talk with two members of Pomfroy's club in Piccadilly—fellows called Messiter and Dawes. They happened to be discussing the Valoise girl a couple of days ago, and the fact that she was having an affair with a chap called Fotherdew—a mutual acquaintance of theirs.

Damsel Doublecross

"It seems Leslie Pomfroy was sitting only a few feet away, and overheard their conversation. They tell me he got up suddenly and left the room, looking as if he'd been taken ill."

"But that doesn't necessarily prove——" began Dixon Hawke.

"Wait a bit. I followed up this lead and found that Pomfroy spent the rest of the day getting well and truly drunk. In one bar he was openly heard to say something about getting even with a certain woman, in between his general condemnation of the female sex."

"He did it, Hawke—there's no doubt about that. I've not pulled him in yet, because I'm waiting to find out how and where he got his poison."

Dixon Hawke sat back in his chair, fingertips touching, a queer little smile on his lips.

"Has it occurred to you, my dear fellow, that if Leslie Pomfroy had wanted to kill Francine Valoise, he had no need to advertise the fact so blatantly?"

"You mean getting tight and shooting off his mouth like that? It's nothing new."

"No, I didn't mean that." Hawke shook his head. "I meant that the last thing he'd have done would be to let himself be seen going to her flat and coming away, just before he intended to commit murder. Your most damning piece of evidence against him is that of the janitor, Simms."

"Perhaps he didn't know that Simms had seen him. Whether or no, they all make mistakes"—Baxter quoted a phrase which was

a stock one at Scotland Yard. "Or maybe he was trying a bluff."

"I don't think so," was Dixon Hawke's rejoinder. "In fact, it was just this very point which caused me to doubt within the first few minutes of the investigation whether Leslie Pomfroy was really the one we wanted. Since then I've discovered that he isn't."

"What!" The Scotland Yard official sat up with a jerk. "Look here, old man, what the dickens are you laughing at?"

Dixon Hawke regarded his friend quizzically.

"Do you know any French, Baxter?"

The inspector looked a trifle blank.

"Well, I still remember—'Avez-vous la plume de ma tante?' That what you mean?"

"What's the French for 'the apples'?"

"The apples?" Baxter's brows creased. "'Why, 'les pommes,' isn't it? I know that much."

"Exactly. Now," continued Hawke slowly, "supposing you started to write that, and couldn't finish it——"

It was Tommy Burke who let out a wild yell.

"Crickey! You've got it, Guv'nor. What this French dame wanted to write wasn't a name at all, but the French for apples! But the first letters happened to coincide with Les Pomfroy's name. Well, I'm blowed!"

Dixon Hawke's assistant stared at his Guv'nor with an amazement equalled only by that registered on the countenance of Inspector Baxter.

"Quite so," agreed Hawke. "Did

Hawke spots the clue—because he could speak French!

you notice that she wrote a small 'p,' which would almost certainly not have been the case had it referred to someone's name? Even in those last anguished moments, she would instinctively have written a capital 'P,' had she meant the word to be 'Pomfroy.' But a small 'p' was in order if she meant 'apples.'"

The C.I.D. man was still staring and gasping.

"B-but, what the—why—I mean to say, how——"

"While you were hunting for dirty glasses," went on Hawke, "I found an apple core on the floor in a corner of the room, where it had no doubt been flung. I brought it here and tested it in my laboratory. It was impregnated with a concentrated solution of arsenic! That's how Francine Valoise died—through eating an apple.

"My next task was to try to find out from whom she got it. Perhaps you noticed the bowl of fruit on the table in her room? This morning I went back to Half Moon Street, and in answer to my questions, Simms informed me that a box of fruit was delivered to Miss Valoise yesterday, by post.

"Fortunately, the wrapping was available amongst the refuse collected last night. The postmark was a Herefordshire one."

"Herefordshire?" gasped Baxter. "But whom did she know there?"

Dixon Hawke spread his hands.

"I'm afraid I've not got as far as that yet. But I've no doubt if you set inquiries afoot you'll learn that Francine has still another man friend somewhere in Herefordshire.

"That's up to you, Baxter. But

you must admit that, under the circumstances, and with that doped apple as concrete evidence, the significance of the words written on the table-cloth lies in another direction than that of young Pomfroy."

"Well, I'm jiggered!" The Yard man rose to his feet. "If what you say proves right, Hawke, it's a dashed lucky thing for Pomfroy that you happened to be around, and I'll say so quite frankly. I'm off to the Yard right away to start some inquiries in the direction you've indicated. I'll let you know as soon as anything breaks."

* * * *

The result of police investigations brought to light the fact that a Mr Henry Bliss, of Herefordshire—one of Francine's numerous admirers—was being benevolently blackmailed by her, under threat of having his follies exposed to his wife. The latter held a controlling interest in his business of paint manufacturing—an industry which called for the extensive use of arsenic in its processes.

Under persistent pressure, Bliss confessed that he had, in desperation, taken steps to silence the French girl, by sending her fruit, amongst which a poisoned apple had been placed.

As Tommy Burke observed, it might have been someone else's bad luck to have eaten that particular apple. In which case, the lovely Francine herself might have come under suspicion of murder. Depending on what had happened then, that might have served Mr Bliss's purpose equally well!



Drug Danger

SIT down, please," said Dixon Hawke to his visitor.

He looked at the card in his hand. It read, "William Christopher Merrill," and down in one corner it said "Merrill Chemical Company, Banford."

Hawke studied the man sitting opposite him, though he did not appear to do so. A greying man, he saw, nearer fifty than forty, quietly but very well dressed, a typical successful business man of

the solid conventional sort. But worried! Definitely worried! Witness his restless hands and the look of strain in his eyes.

"Smoke?" asked the famous private detective, and opened his cigarette case.

Merrill accepted the offer, drew smoke into his lungs, then expelled it with almost a sigh.

"Now, Mr Merrill," said Hawke. "What can I do for you?"

"You will have seen from my card," replied Merrill, "that my business is chemicals. We're manu-

A worried man seeks help from Hawke

facturing chemists in a reasonably big way. It is, and always has been, a purely family firm. I and my brother are partners since my old father retired. I'm sure inquiries will show you we stand very well in the trade."

Hawke nodded, but said nothing.

"In the course of our business," Merrill went on, "we naturally handle drugs—and narcotics—in bulk. Strict security methods have always been in operation—and I may say that all our employees have always understood the necessity for these—and co-operated willingly."

"Naturally," Hawke nodded, and his visitor paused again.

Merrill stubbed his cigarette—not half-smoked—in the ashtray at his side, leaned a little forward, his hands grasping the arms of his chair.

"Recently," he said, "there has been a steady leakage of prohibited narcotics—we prepare them in many forms—and this leakage has continued in spite of our precautions. Over a period of a month something like fifteen pounds of stuff has disappeared, a little at a time. You will realise, of course, the seriousness of this?"

"Quite!" agreed Dixon Hawke. "Unless you can put a stop to it, it will put you out of business."

"Exactly," said William Merrill, and his voice sounded very tired.

"Do I take it you have suspicions of any particular person?" Hawke asked, watching his visitor closely.

"No," said Merrill. "The very nature of our business gives dozens of our employees the chance to

handle the stuff—and presumably to take it. That just can't be avoided. Our precautions are directed to make perfectly sure none of it leaves the building in an unauthorised manner."

"And—lately," Hawke supplemented, "those precautions have broken down."

Merrill pushed a hand through his hair.

"Yes," he acknowledged. "Yes! The stuff's being taken out of the factory—and I haven't the faintest idea how!"

"I see," said Hawke thoughtfully. "Been to the police?"

"No!" Merrill shook his head. "Don't want to if I can help it. That's why I've come to you. Any investigations must obviously be conducted without arousing suspicion among our many employees. An investigation, you see, couldn't last for ever. All the thief need do is just stop helping himself until it was safely over."

"Something in that," agreed Hawke. "Then what have you got in mind?"

"I want you to take the case," Merrill said. "You will naturally fix your own fee. My idea is this. It's Saturday today. Come down to Banford tomorrow and let me entertain you—and your assistant, of course." He nodded at Tommy Burke, who had sat all the time by the window without saying anything at all. "At my house in the town. You can come with me to the factory early on Monday morning."

"I'll see the rumour gets around—I can manage it easily—that we're contemplating expansion, and

They Never Searched the Rats

that you are the one who will find the extra capital needed—if you're satisfied after watching the place at work. That way you could spend a week strolling round, asking what questions you liked, going just where you wished, without arousing suspicions."

"Ingenious," Hawke commented. "And quite workable, I'd say."

"Then you'll come?" William Merrill cried, and the relief in his voice was plain.

"Yes," nodded the detective. "I will. And now, Mr Merrill, again is there anyone you suspect?"

Worry descended sharply on the lean, lined face of the visitor.

"Mr Hawke," he said, "all employees are searched before they leave the factory. That has always been done. There are two exceptions to the rule. Myself—and my younger brother."

"I see," murmured Dixon Hawke. "Very well, Mr Merrill, we'll see you again in Banford on Sunday afternoon."

* * * *

The Merrill factory lay in the centre of Banford, that thriving provincial town, forty miles from London, on the River Bann. William's home lay on the outskirts of the town. His younger brother, Derek, lived half a mile away.

William took Hawke over to Derek's on the Sunday evening. The style in which Derek lived with his wife may very well have accounted, Hawke thought, for William's fear. For fear it was, not suspicion, the Dover Street man decided.

For himself, his training had led him to base his theories on facts and not simply on opinions—not even on his own. He would enter on his job without any preconceived notions.

On The Scene of The Crime

MERRILL, Hawke and Tommy Burke were the first to arrive at the factory on Monday morning—a practice maintained by Merrill since the leakage was first discovered. They reached there at eight o'clock.

The factory fronted the pavement on one of the busier streets. The windows—at least in front—were double, with bars outside. There was only a single entrance.

"There'll be a doorman here on the door later on," Merrill told them quietly. "He'll relieve the double guard we keep in the place at night. When the factory starts working, I'll find someone to take you round."

There was a knock on the office door.

"That'll be George, the janitor," Merrill said. "He is the first to arrive—and the last to leave, except for myself. He does most of his jobs before the rest come in, or after they are gone—emptying rubbish, cleaning up, and so on. As he's in and out all the rooms, he's one who could easily pick up the stuff."

"But you don't think he does?" asked Hawke.

"He's searched—and thoroughly searched—before he goes home each night, just as the rest of them are." The frown was back again on Merrill's worried face. "So far as

The mystery thefts with dozens of suspects

I can be humanly sure, no one is taking drugs out—and yet the stuff is going."

The staff began to arrive. They came in through the single door, filed through to the cloakrooms, left bags and parcels and coats, and dispersed to their own departments.

Derek Merrill came last. Outwardly, at least, the crisis in the firm did not seem to worry him much, but the attitude, Hawke decided, might easily be assumed.

It was Derek who took the detective round.

They started from the top—through the clerical departments and the postal rooms. They went through the first-floor laboratories, where special jobs were done. Here men singly, or in pairs, were working hard at benches.

"Suspects—every one," Derek Merrill declared. "Isn't a single one of them but could lay his hands on the stuff if he wanted to. I don't envy you your job—and I don't hold out much hopes."

They went through the ground-floor labs to the basement below. Here were printing presses for labels, storerooms of various kinds, and a large livestock section. Cages ranged each side of a long corridor.

"Rats, mice and guinea pigs," Derek Merrill explained. "Unpleasant side of the job, perhaps, but strictly necessary if progress is to be made. We've a dozen fellows working on new experiments all the time."

George, the janitor, came shuffling down the corridor, making for the door at the farther end. By their tails he carried three dead rats.

"Hello, George," said Derek. "Been cleaning out the cages?"

The janitor nodded.

"Ay, sir. Only three dead 'uns today."

They followed him down the passage, and watched him open the door.

"The only back entrance," said Derek. "Take a look at it."

The door opened on to a yard—a fairly extensive yard. By double gates in the fence was a gatekeeper's office, with the gateman inside.

"He's there all day," Derek told them. "No one can leave the building without the gateman knowing."

George, having tossed his dead rats into one of the waiting rubbish bins, rubbed his hands together, and disappeared again inside the factory building.

Derek Merrill shuffled his feet.

"Don't think this business hasn't got me worried as much as Bill," he said a little breathlessly. "You see, everybody's searched—except for me—and Bill. I know it isn't me. And I'm just as sure it's not Bill. It's quite unthinkable. But—it's awkward, as you can realise."

"Quite," said Dixon Hawke gravely.

It was surprising how the brothers, so apparently dissimilar, thought along the same lines.

Derek Merrill sighed.

"I'll leave you to it," he said. "Easier for you if you mooch around on your own. And—good luck, anyway. In my opinion, you'll need it."

That was an opinion Tommy Burke was to echo a good many times in the next two days.

They Never Searched the Rats

They crossed the yard to the gates and talked to Dodds, the gateman, a while. All goods for the place were delivered here. The front entrance was only for staff.

Dodds opened the gates while they waited to let the Council dustmen in, grumbled at them for being late, and refastened the gates again after they had gone.

The two detectives went back into the building and down the corridor between the pathetic cages.

George, the janitor, had his cubby hole down at the end of the corridor, they found. He was busy repairing a broken lock when they looked in on him.

Within a strictly limited space George had made himself quite comfortable. On a shelf, between bottles of alum and chloride of lime, and so on, and next to a case of stuffed birds—a Victorian relic, perhaps, from some earlier janitor—was a neat little wireless set. George was listening to a programme while he worked.

He saw Hawke look at the set, so he went over and switched it off.

"Company," he explained. "Ain't much for me to do after I've cleaned the cages and got rid of the corpses—not for a bit, anyway."

"Are there always corpses?" asked Tommy, a little distastefully.

"Ay, mostly." George sounded indifferent. "They fill 'em with this and that, feed on one thing or 't'other. And, if they don't cut 'em up, mostly they dies, anyway."

"I suppose it's necessary," Tommy Burke admitted.

"I wouldn't know about that. That ain't my line," shrugged George.

The phone on his table rang, and he picked up the receiver.

"Sorry, sirs," he said. "Have to leave you now. That's Mr William wanting me."

He waited for them to leave, and locked the door after them.

"Orders," he grunted, in answer to Dixon Hawke's look. "Door has to be kept locked if I'm not in the place."

"Ever forget it?" asked Hawke.

George bridled.

"No! I don't," he retorted sharply. "More'n my job is worth."

He moved away from them, glowering. They followed more leisurely.

As Dixon Hawke and his assistant moved about the factory, snatches of talk overheard gave them the idea that William Merrill's rumour of the reason for their visit was spreading very nicely. Everybody seemed anxious to show them everything.

They watched the search that evening—willingly undergone by all the firm's employees—then were searched themselves to avoid arousing suspicion.

Hawke realised that the search was certainly efficient. He was prepared to swear that nothing went out of the factory without the searcher's knowledge.

Yet the nightly check on stocks revealed that nearly a pound of pure cocaine had gone during the day

Ructions at a Rubbish Dump

"HERE'S an idea," said Tommy Burke at conference that evening in William Merrill's home after an excellent dinner. "It's

Hawke sets out to test a secret theory

one of the postal clerks, I'd say. Stuff is simply done up in an ordinary parcel, with the firm's label stuck outside, and put in with the hundreds of others that leave the place each day."

"We'd thought of that," declared Merrill. "As it goes into the van, every parcel is checked against the order for it."

Tommy looked disappointed.

"But you're on the right lines," Hawke decided. "I've studied the safety precautions. They seem absolutely foolproof. Wherever you've seen a possible gap, through which stuff might filter, you've plugged it. That means that the method used to get the stuff away is so simple and above suspicion you haven't realised it's a gap at all."

"Remember the story, Tommy, of the folk who didn't even notice the postman was about? He was part of the scenery, almost, and could come and go as he willed without exciting comment."

"But the postman——" Merrill began.

"I just mean it's something like that; something so ordinary it's been completely overlooked," Hawke hastened to explain.

Merrill looked nearly frantic.

"It's got to be stopped," he insisted. "Drugs stolen from this firm represent degradation and misery to hundreds and hundreds of folk. I—I'll close the whole place down rather than let it continue."

"Give me another day," the detective suggested quietly.

Tommy looked across at his Guv'nor sharply, but did not ask any questions.

The next day seemed to Tommy to be an exact repetition of the previous one, and to take them just as far forward. But at lunch-time on Wednesday morning Hawke announced that he and Tommy would take a look round the town.

Merrill seemed upset.

"Why?" he demanded sharply. "Are you giving up?"

"No," the detective answered quietly. "I simply want to put to the test an idea I have in my mind."

"You mean you suspect——" began Merrill.

"No," Hawke interrupted. "I mean I believe I know how the stuff is going, and who is getting it away. But I want proof, and I hope to get it."

Beyond that he refused — to Merrill's exasperation, but not to Tommy's surprise—to say anything at all.

"As a matter of fact, we needn't hurry yet awhile," he said to Tommy outside. "Proof of the theory can't be got till later on in the day. But I am tired of being indoors. A run round will do us good."

They went for a run in the car, returning to the vicinity of the town just about half-past five.

A mile or so out of the town, Hawke turned down a lane on the left, followed its course for a few hundred yards, then pulled the car on to the verge.

He climbed leisurely out of the car, strolled across to a gate, and leant his elbows on it. Tommy joined him there.

"Look, Guv'nor," Tommy said, "I'm not given to asking questions, but in beautiful country like this

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why do we have to park and feast our eyes on a rubbish dump?"

"Local interest, Tommy," Hawke replied with a smile. "Ever thought what a headache the dumping of rubbish must cause every local council. There's hundreds of tons of it daily. Some of it can be burnt, some of it can be salvaged, but the bulk of it must be dumped—well away from dwellings.

"Well, here's Banford Council's solution. It's no addition to Nature's beauty, but it's the best they could do in the circumstances."

Smoke smudged the darkening sky on the further side of the dump. Some of the rubble was burning. Nearer at hand two or three ragged youngsters were turning freshly-dumped stuff over.

"Treasure hunting," Hawke murmured. "Some of them come every day. There's an irresistible attraction in a rubbish dump. Strange how what to you may be rubbish to someone else may be——"

He broke off short.

From somewhere a little to the left a man had joined the children in their search of the freshly-dumped rubbish.

"Good grief!" said Tommy sharply. "That's——"

"Quiet!" Hawke interrupted. "We don't want to scare him away."

"Do you mean you knew he'd be coming, and were waiting for him here?" Tommy Burke demanded.

"More or less that," the detective admitted. "But——"

"Look," whispered Tommy. "He's found something or other there."

"He's found what he came for," Hawke nodded.

The man had picked something up and dumped it into a bag—a neat little attache-case—he carried.

They watched him repeat the performance twice. He had been operating so far with his back towards them. Now he straightened and turned round.

Dixon Hawke clambered over the gate.

"Come on, Tommy, quickly! This is where we get him," he ordered sharply.

Next moment they were both running towards the diligent searcher.

For a second he did not seem to realise at all that it was him they were after. He continued walking towards them, carefully picking his way over old tins and broken bottles, over ash and sodden paper. Then he pulled up with a jerk, gave a startled cry, wheeled, and went running off.

Tommy swerved to the left in an effort to cut him off before he could reach the hedge. The man changed direction right, and realised that Hawke was cutting his lead that way.

It was a weird and fantastic chase over the rubbish dump—and only the three concerned could know the deadly seriousness of it.

The youngsters, who at first must have thought it some inexplicable game, sensed its grimness in a while, and hurried furtively away to watch from the safety of the hedge.

Yard by yard the detectives cut the fugitive's lead, checking every attempt to double and escape. Under their pounding feet the rubbish shifted treacherously. Twice Tommy measured his length on the ground.

A fight to the finish—on a corporation rubbish dump!

Their quarry must have felt he was definitely trapped. Whichever way he turned they were there to head him off. His heart was pounding madly. His lungs were labouring. Blood sang in his head.

With a curse he flung his case away, whirled suddenly round in his tracks, his hand going to his pocket.

"Look out, Guv'nor," yelled Tommy—and dived for their quarry's feet.

The crash of a gun filled the air. Flame spurted—or so it seemed—within a few inches of Dixon Hawke's face.

Next instant the detectives were both grappling with George, the janitor, who fought with the fierceness of panic and not by Queensberry Rules. He bit and kicked and clawed, and while he fought he raved.

It was Dixon Hawke who finished the fight. He drove a crashing right, with the weight of his body behind it, on to the point of the janitor's jaw.

George grunted and dropped to the ground. They handcuffed him as he lay there, then dragged him to his feet as consciousness returned.

"Find that case, Tommy," Hawke ordered, as he forced the now sullen George towards the gate and the car. "Don't open it! We'll wait for that till we get to Merrill's place."

It was a dishevelled and battered trio a startled butler showed into William Merrill's study.

Explanations were short.

"I—I can't tell you," Merrill stammered, "just what this means to me. But I still don't understand."

"It had to be simple," said Dixon

Hawke. "Simple and commonplace. The answer's there in the bag."

He laid it on the table, opened it, and stepped away.

"Rats!" whispered William Merrill. "There's nothing but three dead rats."

"Exactly," Hawke nodded briefly. "Stuffed, as you will find, with the missing and deadly narcotics. Dumped, morning after morning, as a matter of routine, into the rubbish bins—and obligingly collected and carried away from the factory, by unwitting accomplices of an unspeakable crime."

"So all he had to do was to collect them from the dump," Tommy Burke explained. "And laugh up his sleeve all the while at your presumably fool-proof precautions. But——"

"But what, Tommy?" Hawke inquired.

"What put you on to George—in the first place, of course, I mean?"

"Chloride of lime," Hawke said quietly. "Chloride of lime and alum. There was soft soap and camphor as well. All on the shelf in the cubby hole with the wireless set and the case of stuffed birds. All of them are used—or they may be—in various preparations connected with taxidermy."

"It was enough to make me think. I soon guessed that George was an expert on taxidermy, and, instead of the usual stuffing of the craft, he used the stolen drugs to pad out the skins of the dead rats."

He turned to a speechless Merrill.

"And now I think, Mr Merrill," he said, "it is time you rang up the police."



The Bottle Mystery

OLD ladies—unlike old soldiers—do die. In the natural order of things, more old ladies than young ones. Therefore, the death of an old lady, though it may be very sudden, is never absolutely and completely unexpected.

Mrs Mary Harrington was nearly eighty-two. She died—alone—on a Sunday night, and was buried the following Wednesday.

Other people, of course, died on that Sunday night, and pressure on space prevented an obituary notice appearing in the papers till the day after the funeral.

Dixon Hawke saw the notice while

he was having his breakfast on the Thursday morning. It conveyed nothing to him at all. There was no reason why it should.

The private detective had passed to another page when Tommy Burke came in. Tommy was his live-wire young assistant, and he handed across a visiting card as Hawke looked up from the paper.

"Lady would like to see you," he said. "She's in the office now."

Tommy added, with the air of a hard-bitten connoisseur, "Bit of a smasher, Guv'nor."

According to the card, Tommy's

What was the mystery behind an old lady's death?

"bit of a smasher" was Miss Janet Martin, of Harrington House. The name rang a bell in Hawke's mind.

He crossed the hall to the small spare room he used chiefly as an office. A girl in her early twenties, slim, dark-haired, dark-eyed and neat—deserving Tommy's description—rose from a chair as the detective entered. There was nervousness in the movement, and something more, Hawke thought, in the wideness of the dark eyes.

"Miss Martin?" he asked. "Please sit down. Now what can I do for you?"

She seemed hesitant to begin.

"I—I don't quite know," she said. "Perhaps I'm worrying, with no cause to worry at all. You may think it merely foolish, but, you see, it's about my aunt. My great-aunt, actually. She—she died last Sunday night."

"She had had a long life," said Hawke gently. "Death can't have been so unexpected. I saw the notice in the paper this morning."

"That's right," agreed Janet. "For some years her heart had been playing her tricks. She suffered from angina. Dr Hartman always said that was the way she would go. It's—it's something that happened last night that has—has got me worrying."

"Take your time," Hawke advised her, "and tell me all about it."

"I loved my aunt," she said. "So did everyone who knew her. She was generous and kind—and she never complained. I looked after her—companion, you might say—

though she made that task so light it was scarcely a job at all. Harrington House was my home. I'm afraid I'm telling this badly."

"Tell it your own way," advised Hawke. "There isn't any better."

"It's wrong to think of my aunt as a confirmed invalid," continued Janet. "She was nothing of the sort. She was frightfully independent. The heart attacks she had were often very slight—though they could be extremely painful. She never spoke of them unless we happened to be there."

"She took things easily, of course. Quite often stayed in bed all day. When she did get up she simply went and sat in the communicating room. Her rooms are on the first floor, and she hasn't been downstairs for months."

"She seemed quite bright and cheerful on Sunday. The doctor came in the morning—he came in most days, by the way—and chatted with her for a bit. He was fond of her, too. She was up when he arrived."

"I had lunch in her room with her. She slept in the afternoon. She went to bed about nine o'clock—a little later than usual. I left her there with her glass of hot milk, settled in for the night. Ellen, the maid, found her dead when she took her tea in on Monday morning."

Hawke noticed the hands which lay on her lap had clenched themselves very tightly.

"She died—alone," she whispered. "Alone—and in great pain. The look on her face told us that."

Hawke waited with no sign of impatience. So far, what he had

The Aspirin Packed a Punch

heard hardly seemed to concern him as an investigator.

"She was buried yesterday," said Janet.

"Then the doctor had no doubt as to the cause of death," put in Hawke.

"None," said Janet.

"Then what?" the detective asked.

"It was yesterday evening," replied the girl. "Fluff, my aunt's pet dog, got almost hysterical. She seemed to sense somehow her mistress had finally gone away. I crushed up an aspirin tablet and gave it to her in warm milk. She drank it—yelped—rolled over and died. As suddenly as that."

There was an edge on her voice, Hawke noticed. He said nothing at all, but waited.

"Those aspirins," she continued. "My aunt took two every night just before she lay down, with that glass of warm milk. I'd taken the bottle out of the room after—after she was dead. It was an aspirin from that bottle I crushed and gave to Fluff. So, you see——"

"Yes," broke in Hawke. "I see. That bottle of aspirin now. Have you——"

"Yes. It's here," said the girl, and handed a bottle over—a small bottle that, full, had contained twenty-five five-grain tablets. It looked about half-full now. Hawke unscrewed the plain white cap, then screwed it on again.

"Why didn't you tell what you told me to the doctor?" asked Dixon Hawke.

"I—I don't really know," the girl quavered. "It—it seemed too completely fantastic. I—I thought all

night about it. I'd heard of you, of course, and I decided to come along to you as soon as I could this morning."

"I see," nodded Dixon Hawke. "Well—you must leave this bottle with me. If there's nothing wrong with it you can set your mind at rest. I'd say nothing at all to anyone else. Wait till you hear from me."

Gratitude showed in her eyes as she stood up again. She watched while Hawke sealed the bottle in an envelope and noted particulars on it.

"It didn't enter your mind to consult your aunt's solicitor about your—er—suspicions?" he asked, holding out his hand.

"It did," she said at once. "But Mr Gregory is away holidaying on the Continent. Should I have done?"

"Hard to say," smiled Hawke. "Anyway, now you can leave things to me."

She left in a flurry of thanks. Tommy was waiting handy to see her out of the door.

"You might have offered my services to drive her home again," he grumbled to Dixon Hawke.

"I might—but I didn't," smiled Hawke. "You've got something else to do. Take these round and get them analysed." He handed the envelope to Tommy. "Tell Bill I'm in a hurry to get his verdict on them."

A Job For The Yard

THE chemist's report came along late in the afternoon. Ten tablets, so he explained, had been left in the bottle. Nine were ordinary

The clue of the poisoned puppy

aspirin. The tenth, he found, contained a lethal dose of heroin.

"What now?" Tommy inquired.

Dixon Hawke looked grave.

"The Yard, of course," he said.

"This isn't the sort of thing we can work on by ourselves. Let's hope we get hold of Baxter."

So far as that went they were lucky. Detective-Inspector Baxter, of the Flying Squad, saw them in his room. He and Dixon Hawke were old friends—and old rivals, too. He listened while Hawke told the tale.

"It means exhumation, of course," concluded the private detective. "And time looks like being precious. Good job for us the old lady didn't stipulate for cremation."

"I'll get on to the Home Office straight away," declared Baxter.

The remains of Mary Harrington were disinterred that night in a veil of secrecy. Home Office pathologists worked through the small hours of the morning, to report, half an hour before dawn, that sufficient heroin was present in the remains to have caused Mary Harrington's death.

"That's torn it," Baxter grumbled when he came round to visit Hawke and give him the final report. "I don't like these poison cases."

"Especially this one," said Hawke. "It looks ingenious. According to Janet Martin, the old lady took two aspirins each night. That means the bottle was first used—let me see—last Monday. Any time you like—anyone you like—between Monday and Sunday night took three, or maybe four, aspirin tablets out and substituted heroin, harmless-looking, but absolutely lethal."

"Not anyone," said Tommy. "It had to be someone who knew she took them regularly. I suppose he risked anyone else getting at the bottle. Cold-blooded, wasn't it?"

"He—or she," put in Hawke.

"Why—you don't think——" Tommy began.

"Not at present," said Hawke. "We don't know enough about the people concerned."

"I can guess, though," Baxter grumbled. "We'll find at least half a dozen people with a motive and opportunity. Oh, well! I suppose we'll have to get down to it. As you're coming, we might as well use your car."

Harrington House, though not over-large, was very obviously the home of a wealthy woman. It stood in extensive grounds a couple of miles or so outside the town of Watford.

They arrived at 8 p.m.—an awkward time to arrive. A maid opened the door to their ring. They asked for Miss Janet Martin, and were shown into a library, a comfortable room that spoke of frequent use.

Janet Martin came in. She pulled up when she saw Dixon Hawke, and much of her colour went.

Hawke introduced the inspector. Janet sat down a little abruptly. Baxter told her quietly the reason for their visit.

"You see what it means, Miss Martin," he said. "The case is wide open. Anyone who visited her, say, between Monday and Sunday night could have tampered with that bottle. Did she have many visitors?"

Janet shook her head.

The Aspirin Packed a Punch

"Let—let me think a little," she begged. "Nobody came on Monday. The vicar called on Tuesday. He didn't stay very long. Just time for a cup of tea.

"No one came on Wednesday. At least, I think that's right. But on Thursday Mr Gregory came. He is—was—Aunt's solicitor. He comes down once a month—on the last Saturday usually. This month he was ten days early."

"Why?" snapped Baxter at once.

"He was taking a holiday abroad—touring in his car. He aimed to be away a month—so put his visit forward. But he came back today, of course, as soon as he heard the news. He arrived about two hours ago. He's having dinner with the rest. Apparently his office managed at last to contact him and tell him of my aunt's death."

"All right," nodded Baxter. "What next?"

"Let me see," said the girl. "On Friday Colonel Lashmore came in during the evening. That's a usual affair. He's our nearest neighbour. He came in every Friday for a game of cribbage with Aunt. She—she was very fond of the game."

Janet dabbed at her eyes with a tiny handkerchief.

"On Saturday," she went on, "Roger arrived. That's Roger Harrington. She was his great-aunt, too. He often came down for week-ends. He's still here, as it happens. Stayed on for Aunt's funeral."

"Of course, Dr Hartman saw my aunt every day except—except Thursday, I believe. He's dining with us tonight. And—and that's

all, I believe. Except for the maid, naturally."

"Not at all," said Inspector Baxter. "You yourself, I take it, were in and out of your aunt's two rooms all day and every day?"

"That's perfectly true," she said quietly.

"All right," said Baxter. "I wonder if you'd send the doctor along. Leave me to tell him about it, please. Tommy, perhaps—"

Tommy went, accompanying Janet Martin.

Dr John Hartman came in a few minutes later.

Baxter let him down as lightly as he could. The mistake the doctor had made was a bad one—but understandable. All men make mistakes. Not many stand to lose as much as a popular doctor as a consequence. He gave them very little extra information.

Sooner or later Mary Harrington would have died—painfully—of angina. Someone had made it sooner. Janet, he believed, had bought the aspirins on the Monday morning while she was shopping in Watford. He gave them the chemist's address.

Baxter dismissed him, and requested Tommy Burke to show the solicitor in.

The Five Suspects

SILAS GREGORY came, curious but self-possessed. The news Baxter told him bluntly was obviously a shock, but he answered questions readily.

Mary Harrington, he said, was a very wealthy woman. Though her

Four men and a girl—and all with a motive for murder!

health was poor, her brain was alert. She demanded a monthly accounting. That explained his visits.

The questions went on and on. The answers were candid and helpful. Baxter's face grew grimmer. When at last the solicitor went, the inspector's expression was very grim indeed.

"I knew it," he said to Hawke. "Felt it in my bones. Every one with a motive, according to her will. The vicar—six hundred pounds to be spent on church repairs. Colonel Lashmore—a piece of land he's been hankering after for years and constantly trying to buy. The solicitor—five thousand pounds.

"The girl—the house and contents and five hundred pounds a year. The great-nephew—the residue. And that's going to be quite a lot. Why! Every one of them benefits from the old girl's death!

"There's nothing at all can tell us which of them slipped the heroin into that aspirin bottle! If that dog hadn't got hysterics we'd never have known at all that Mary Harrington was poisoned."

"That was lucky—for us," agreed Hawke. "And bad luck for the murderer. It was—almost—the perfect crime. Perhaps fate—or luck if you like—will favour us again."

Baxter rose from his chair.

"And maybe it won't," he decided pessimistically.

They decided to stay that night at a hotel in Watford, though both Janet and young Roger—Hawke rather liked the lad—pressed them to stay at the house.

The next morning Baxter went

back to the house again. Hawke did not accompany him. Someone would have to make a routine visit to the chemist who had supplied the drug. The Dover Street detective offered to do the job.

Hawke and Tommy found the shop in a turning off the busy High Street. Yes! The man remembered serving Miss Janet Martin. She often came into the shop. Certainly aspirin was one of the things she bought.

The chemist looked aghast at Hawke's tentative suggestion that possibly the bottle had been tampered with before sale.

"My dear sir," he said sharply, "that's impossible. The goods I sell in this shop are of the highest quality."

He fetched out a fitted drawer filled with bottles of aspirin.

"Blue Circle Brand," he snorted. "A brand with a reputation. Manufactured and bottled with super-scrupulous care. Each bottle plainly branded with their usual blue circle as a guarantee of the goods. No! The purest aspirin was what Miss Martin wanted. That's what she got!"

"I was afraid so," Hawke admitted. "But, you see, I had to check. I am sorry to have wasted your time."

"Oh, not at all, I'm sure," the mollified chemist muttered.

"So that's that, Guv'nor," said Tommy as they emerged from the shop. "Where do we go to now? Back to Harrington House?"

"I—don't think so, Tommy," Hawke replied. "I rather think we'll pay a call on the vicar."

The Aspirin Packed a Punch

Tommy glanced at him sharply, then shrugged his shoulders and followed Hawke to the car.

The vicar seemed pleased to see them.

"Come in!" he boomed. "A vicar can always find time enough to entertain visitors. But—good gracious! What's the matter? Surely you are ill!"

Indeed, Hawke had staggered slightly—and had pressed his hand to his head. Tommy watched in wonderment.

Hawke subsided into a chair.

"A—a little dizziness," he explained. "Eyestrain and overwork. Nasty pain in the head."

"My dear sir," boomed the vicar, "let me get you something."

"Don't bother, please!" begged Hawke. "But—perhaps—if you have them handy—a couple of aspirins."

"Of course," cried the vicar—and disappeared from the room, to return a moment later with half a glass of water and a bottle of aspirin—the same brand as the chemist had shown them. Tommy recognised it by the blue circle on the cap.

Hawke swallowed two tablets—and they seemed to do him good. When they left, in half an hour, after talking of this and that, Hawke seemed his usual self.

"Where now?" Tommy demanded. "And what—"

"To Colonel Lashmore's," said Hawke. "What's the betting, Tommy, he doesn't keep aspirin at all—but offers a spot of brandy?"

"You've got a hope!" grinned Tommy Burke.

By the time they came out of

Colonel Lashmore's Tommy was really intrigued. He had not the faintest idea what it was his wily Guv'nor was after. Nor would Dixon Hawke say. To Tommy's disappointment, he was told to go back to the house and offer what help he could to Inspector Baxter. Hawke himself, it seemed, planned a visit back to London.

"Tell Baxter to hold his horses till I come back again," was his parting instruction to Tommy. "I'll make it some time this evening, if I have any luck."

As a matter of fact, the guests at the house were all of them in the library, drinking after-dinner coffee, when Hawke entered the room.

"Mr Hawke," gasped Janet, "have you—"

"I've plenty to say," declared Hawke. "If the inspector doesn't mind, perhaps he'll let me say it?"

Baxter simply nodded.

"We all know now," said Dixon Hawke, "that a very gentle old lady was murdered a week ago last night. It was a cold-blooded murder, so diabolically clever that, if fate hadn't been kind to me, it would have remained unsolved."

Janet rose to her feet. Her face was very white.

"You mean——" she began.

"Please!" insisted Hawke. "I must ask you not to interrupt. I want you to see, if you can, what happened in Mary Harrington's room when one of her visitors was there."

"The visitor knew that bottle would be standing on the table beside the old lady's bed. He had come prepared for his crime. In his

The blue circle that branded a killer

pocket he had another small bottle like the one that is standing there. It contains but three or four heroin tablets. Mrs Harrington, of course, is in her sitting-room, in her usual armchair, back towards the bedroom door.

"Some time during the visit the murderer makes an excuse to go into the bedroom. Easy enough to do. Perhaps an offer to fetch her something, to save her moving herself.

"He walks over to the table. With his back towards the door, covering his movements, he takes the bottle from his pocket, unscrews the cap, and spills into his hand the tablets it contains.

"He picks up the other bottle—opens that as well—extracts an equal number of aspirin tablets—slips the heroin in instead—screws on the cap once more—and probably gives the bottle a shake."

Young Roger Harrington stirred. Baxter looked across at him sharply.

"The aspirin tablets go into his own bottle, which, capped again, is slipped back into his own pocket. He goes back to the sitting-room to talk to his victim. The stage has been cleverly set."

"So cleverly," growled Baxter, "that this cunning murderer of yours is likely to get away with it."

"Oh, no!" said Dixon Hawke quietly. "You see, he made a mistake. He was working very quickly. When he closed the aspirin bottle after inserting the heroin he picked up and screwed on the wrong cap."

Deathly silence followed his words.

"The only aspirin supplied to Mrs Harrington was of a certain

brand—'Blue Circle' brand, in fact," Dixon Hawke went on. "Round the rim of the otherwise plain cap was a narrow circle—trademark of the brand. But on the bottle handed to me by Janet Martin on Thursday, and passed by me to the Yard, was a cap completely white!

"So the murderer carried round a bottle—possibly of some completely different brand—with a 'Blue Circle' cap screwed on."

Hawke took out of his pocket a short manila envelope. From it he extracted an aspirin bottle containing a few tablets.

"According to the label it was bought in London," he said. "The chemist who supplied it tells me the makers are Watts & Co., whose mark is a tiny red star. But—" He pointed to the bottle—"I think you can, all of you, see the blue circle round the cap!

"I found it—"

Silas Gregory, no longer urbane and calm, leapt suddenly from his chair and dived towards the door. Tommy tripped him neatly. The burly Inspector Baxter flung himself on his man.

"Yes," said Dixon Hawke. "I found it in a drawer in Silas Gregory's office! If only he'd thrown it away! But I suppose he thought that it offered not the slightest clue. But, unknown to him, it carried the wrong screw cap, and I think it will certainly hang him."

That prophecy was true. Examination of Gregory's books showed that he had been using Mary Harrington's funds as his own, and, fearful of discovery, had brutally killed his client.

BULLET FOR A BANKER



The Quick-Working Robbers

BASKING in the welcome spring sunshine, the mellowed walls of Barchester echoed to very few sounds between the hours of one and two. Nine out of ten of the market town's 32,000 inhabitants were taking their midday meal. Most of the businesses closed for the lunch hour. A few tobacconists and small general shops were the exception.

It was outside the tobacconist's next door to the Cornhill Bank that

the black saloon car pulled up, a twelve horse-power model of a kind found in thousands on the roads of England. The occupants were two men with hats pulled well down over their eyes against the dazzle of the sun, and a young woman in a smart linen costume. She climbed out and went into the shop in search of cigarettes.

Ten seconds later the two men sauntered up the steps into the bank. There they immediately produced revolvers fitted with silencers and

The gunmen struck at lunch-time!

covered the only customer and Thomas Barker, the cashier, who was attending to him.

The cashier and the manager, John Harraway, were the sole members of the staff on duty during the lunch period. Harraway was inside the strong-room getting certain securities for the customer, who had asked for them. The strong-room door was open, and Barker's involuntary cry brought the manager rushing out to see what had happened.

Next moment he collapsed on the floor, clutching at his chest, where he had been struck by a bullet fired by the taller of the two armed men. Immediately this man vaulted over the uncaged part of the counter, and threatened to finish the wounded Harraway if he made another sound. The bandit then entered the strong-room.

His accomplice leaned easily against the wall, keeping a watch on the door, on Barker, and on Malcolm Finch, the customer.

"You'll get the same if either of you move," he murmured.

Harraway was groaning, but not loud enough to attract attention in the street, where the young woman had now returned to the car and taken her place behind the wheel. The engine was ticking over.

The taller bandit emerged from the strong-room three or four minutes later with a bulging canvas bag. He paused just long enough to clear out the drawer in front of the cringing cashier, then the two bank robbers ran from the bank and jumped into the already moving car.

As they sped round the corner on to the Marfield road, Thomas Barker rang the alarm bell. Barchester was aroused to the fact that their most important bank had been the scene of an armed robbery unparalleled in the history of the district.

The black saloon was found two miles out of the town. It had been stolen from a parking place at the other side of Barchester only half an hour earlier, and its loss had not even then been reported by its owner, who was partaking of a hearty lunch in the Black Bull. The bandits had obviously had another and more powerful car awaiting them, and they had made a complete getaway with over £14,000, all in notes.

* * * *

It was nearly a month before Dixon Hawke was called in as a last resource by the Cornhill Bank. The police had completely failed to trace either the bandits or the money. John Harraway had fortunately recovered from his wound, but was still confined to his home, and was looking considerably the worse for his unfortunate experience when Dixon Hawke interviewed him after visiting the scene of the crime.

"Surely that was a large sum of money to have in notes in a bank of that size?" queried the famous private detective.

"It was the one day of the week when we had that much cash on the premises," replied Harraway. "The new aircraft works on the outskirts of the town now employ over 1200 men and women. Friday is their pay day, and nearly £7000 in notes was made up in readiness for their

messengers to take away that afternoon. The bandits must have known that."

"They seem to have known a good deal, including the fact that there were only two of you on duty during the lunch hour," remarked Dixon Hawke. "Speed was the essence of their success. If the strong-room had not been open at the time, how much would they have got in notes?"

"No more than a few hundred pounds. It was most unfortunate that I had the door open at the time — just one chance in a thousand," said the bank manager. "The scoundrel who shot me had everything his own way. The aircraft works' money was standing ready in packages. Nothing could have been simpler for the thieves."

"You would recognise the men again?"

"The man who shot me? Yes, I think so, although his hat was pulled down over his face. The other man I scarcely saw, but Barker and Mr Finch, the customer who was there at the time, got a good look at him. They have given their descriptions."

"H'm, and they differ considerably. In moments of excitement people are apt to be unobservant. The fact remains that the police have been unable to trace either the men or the girl."

John Harraway nodded grimly.

"It all happened so swiftly. I doubt whether they were inside the bank more than four minutes. I was in too much pain to observe very much. I was expecting a second bullet."

"Yes, as I have said, speed was the essence of their plan. That it was a well-planned and premeditated affair is obvious. They did not merely rush into the bank in the hope of grabbing something."

"They knew what they were going to get, which indicates inside knowledge. Yet you and your cashier are certain they were not local people?"

"Definitely."

"And you had never seen them in the bank before?"

"To the best of our knowledge, no. Barker will bear me out in that."

"What about the customer, Malcolm Finch? Is he local?"

"Not by birth, but he has lived in Barchester over a year. He retired here from business in London about that time ago, and opened an account with us. He has a weak heart, and I fear the shock of the affair has done him no good. He has been quite ill."

"May I ask if his account is worth much to you?"

Harraway looked shocked at the question. He hesitated before replying.

"It's not a big account. He deposited about £1000 with us and certain securities which we were keeping for him. He draws very little."

"And it was only because he wanted those securities that you opened the strong-room at the time?"

"Yes, that is so."

Dixon Hawke asked Malcolm Finch's address, thanked Harraway for his help, and returned to the car with Tommy Burke.

"The trail's too cold, Guv'nor," declared Tommy, as they drove off in search of Walnut Cottage, Finch's abode. "If they'd called you in immediately after the robbery you might have had a chance of discovering something."

"They didn't think of calling me in until the police failed," said Hawke grimly. "As you say, the trail is very cold. I can only hope for a fresh lead. We'll hear what Mr Malcolm Finch has to say."

The Dangerous Driving Riddle

WALNUT COTTAGE was on the edge of the town, a four-roomed converted labourer's cottage set in a large garden. Malcolm Finch evidently lived alone, for he opened the door personally.

A middle-aged man with sharp yet pleasant features, he had twinkling blue eyes behind his spectacles. His spare, tweed-clad form was ever on the move.

When Dixon Hawke had explained the purpose of their visit, Finch welcomed them warmly.

"I only hope you can trace the scoundrels, for they gave me the shock of my life," he declared emphatically. "I fear, however, that you are too late. The police are of the opinion that these people had no previous criminal record, that they planned just this one coup, and that they are now back living their ordinary lives. I believe criminals of that type—virtually amateurs—are the hardest to catch."

"That's true," agreed Hawke, looking round at the mid-Victorian furniture and the pictures crowd-

ing the walls. "I understand you came to Barchester more than a year ago, Mr Finch? I see you have taken this cottage furnished."

Finch looked at him sharply, then smiled.

"You are observant, Mr Hawke. Yes, this would not be my taste in furniture. When I retired from business I decided to settle in the country, and thought of Barchester because I had passed through it several times and had lunched at the Black Bull.

"I liked the place. But I'm a cautious man, and before attempting to buy a property I wisely rented a furnished place for a year to enable me to decide whether Barchester was the right spot."

"And is it? Will you be staying here?"

"No, I've found out the drawbacks of the district. For one thing, it is too high up, and that's bad for my heart. I shall be moving at the end of the quarter."

At Hawke's request, Finch gave his version of the hold-up, and described the two men as he had seen them. Except for his descriptions of the men, the account tallied exactly with that of the bank manager.

"Some people have asked me why I did nothing to prevent the get-away of the scoundrels," he finished, "but I was too shocked—my heart was beating so violently that I feared a total collapse. The whole thing was so sudden, and to see Harraway shot down in that brutal fashion nearly finished me. I was ill for a week afterwards."

Hawke nodded sympathetically.

Bullet For a Banker

"People who talk of what they would have done under similar circumstances are usually talking wildly," he said. "No one with any commonsense would blame you for standing aside. You would probably have got a bullet in you if you'd done otherwise. You did not see the girl at all?"

"No, she did not appear in view of the door, but I understand the tobacconist has described her."

"Unfortunately, his description of her is extremely vague—tall, blonde, good-looking. There are thousands of young women answering to that description."

"There is just one other thing, Mr Finch. You went to the bank to obtain certain securities. Had you any particular reason for doing that?"

Finch reddened and fidgeted. He looked embarrassed.

"Yes—er—I'll be frank with you, Mr Hawke. I'm a very nervous man. Maybe my heart makes me like that. I wake up in the night and think of all manner of alarming things."

"Sometimes I wonder what would happen to me if war was suddenly declared and they shut down the banks. I would not be able to get away to a safe place because I would have no money. I therefore decided to keep something by me against which I could easily borrow money."

"I see, and—do you usually go to the bank during the lunch hour?"

"No, that was because—nervous again—I did not want anyone to know what I was doing. I knew the bank was usually empty about that time. I might mention that I have since realised how very foolish I was, and have given up the idea."

He smiled disarmingly, and Tommy Burke was somewhat surprised when Hawke said—

"That explains everything. I now have to interview young Barker, the cashier, who, I understand, has been moved to the Marfield branch of the bank. I wonder if you would do me the favour of driving over to Marfield with me, so that I can bring you and him together?"

"It is possible that you might be able to remind one another of something that you have individually forgotten. Of course, if you would rather not——"

"Certainly, certainly! I'll do anything to help you," declared Finch, and fetched his hat.

He sat beside Hawke, and Tommy Burke, relegated to the back seat, had never had a more uncomfortable ride, for his Guv'nor seemed to have become utterly reckless. Normally the most competent of drivers, Dixon Hawke raced through those narrow lanes at breakneck speed, turned blind corners in a criminal fashion, and nearly collided with a farm cart. He broke every traffic rule ever invented before they reached Marfield and caught young Barker before he returned to the bank after his lunch hour.

Tommy Burke was too shocked to voice any complaint, but he asked himself what had happened to cause such deterioration in Hawke's driving.

Phone Call Betrayal

THERE was no more relieved young man in all Britain than Tommy Burke when they put Finch down at Walnut Cottage an hour



Driving at high speed along the narrow country road, Dixon Hawke barely missed a collision with the lumbering horse-drawn farm cart.

and a half later. The return journey had been more nightmarish than the outward trip. Dixon Hawke seemed to have a fiendish urge to see how close he could go to disaster. Even Finch had looked a little limp when he had shaken hands and gone indoors.

The talk with Barker had produced nothing new. "The story he had told had been exactly the same as the one he had given the police. It seemed that their journey had been wasted.

"D'you mind if I drive for a while, Guv'nor?" said Tommy Burke, as they prepared to move off. "I—I'd rather like to."

Dixon Hawke looked at him and grinned.

"I thought you didn't enjoy the journey to Marfield and back! Don't worry! I shan't drive like that again."

"But why did you do it, Guv'nor? You nearly wrecked us half a dozen times. I thought you'd gone crazy! Why?"

"It was all for the benefit of Malcolm Finch, who was at pains to tell us about his nervousness and weak heart. Maybe you noticed that he was far less nervous than you were. His heart was not affected in any way, yet the affair at the bank is supposed to have put him in bed for a week.

"If he had been a real heart subject he would have fainted when we nearly hit that farm cart. I gained a few grey hairs myself. That was not intended."

"But——"

"It was a notion of mine to try Finch out. There is nothing wrong with his heart. He lied about being nervous. That means the reason he

gave for wanting those securities was a lie. It was all I wanted to prove, Tommy."

"But I still don't see—— Hi, that's not the way into the town, Guv'nor!"

They had taken the left fork at the crossroads. Hawke merely nodded.

"I know that. I'm doubling back by way of the loop road to come within sight of Walnut Cottage again. There is no phone at the cottage, but there is one the top of the hill on the other side. I'm interested to see whether Malcolm Finch uses it."

Three minutes later they pulled up under some trees on the bend of the road leading from Marfield to the crossroads. They climbed out, and, going through a gateway into a field, they walked along behind the hedge until they were directly at the rear of the red-painted phone box which stood facing the hill up from Walnut Cottage. Hawke made a peephole in the thick foliage, and almost immediately murmured—

"He's coming. There's no hope of seeing which number he dials if he puts through a local call, but if he has to ask exchange for an out-of-town number we may overhear something. Use your ears."

Finch was hurrying up the hill. He paused to let a car speed past, then crossed and entered the phone box. They heard him lift the receiver and dial O. Hawke nudged Tommy. This meant Finch wanted a distant call, one not on the local dialling system.

When the operator of the exchange replied, Finch said—

"Wilbury 1029."

The man who forgot to be afraid!

Hawke blessed the fact that the door of the kiosk was a little stiff. It did not close completely, but that fact did not seem to worry the caller. The road on either side of him was empty. He believed he had perfect privacy.

"Tenpence?" he queried, in reply to a remark by the operator. "I'm putting in a shilling."

The two detectives heard the coin drop, then—

"Is that you, Sally? Les at home? No? Oh, that's a pity. When will he be in? Seven! Then I'll ring again at seven.

"No, there's nothing very wrong. Everything all right your end? You're not buying too many new hats, I hope? Good girl! Tell Les to expect my call."

He rang off and left the box, walking slowly down the hill. Dixon Hawke and Tommy recrossed the field to where they had left their car.

"You're not buying too many new hats, I hope?" repeated Dixon Hawke thoughtfully. "I think that clinches it. It shows that the young woman in question has some money to burn. We'll go back to the town and see the Chief Inspector. I don't think there's much doubt about our next move."

Neither did Chief Inspector Wallis when he learned who his visitor was and the reason for his call. A swift inquiry was put through to find out the address in Wilbury which had the phone number 1029. It was apparently the residence of a young couple named Marchant, Lester Marchant being a salesman in a local garage.

Three-quarters of an hour later a closed van had a breakdown not far from the Marchant house. While the overall-clad driver tinkered with its engine, a number of men watched the house through holes drilled in the side of the van. One of these was Thomas Barker, the cashier from the Cornhill Bank.

It was not until ten minutes to seven that a small car drew up outside Number 17. A tall, dark man climbed out and opened the gate.

"That's him!" exclaimed Barker, nudging Dixon Hawke. "That's the one who shot Mr Harraway. I'd know him anywhere, in spite of the fact that he's shaved off his moustache."

It was 7.5 when the plain-clothes police from Barchester, accompanied by a local superintendent, raided the house.

Dixon Hawke was the first into the small parlour, where Lester Marchant was speaking on the phone to Malcolm Finch. He was able to trip the man before he could reach the drawer where a silenced revolver was afterwards found.

At the same time Barchester police arrested Malcolm Finch in the phone box at the cross-roads.

The tobacconist identified Sally Marchant as the blonde who had visited his shop the day of the bank robbery. It was she who later betrayed George Russell, the second raider, who had once been a tennis partner of hers.

Nearly all the stolen notes were found hidden in the house at Wilbury. The four conspirators had decided not to begin to spend the money until Finch had left Walnut Cottage and moved elsewhere.



What The Maid Heard

AS she opened the small side gate which led to the path through the shrubbery, Annie Stubbins sighed with relief. Another few minutes now and she would be safe indoors. That is, if they hadn't locked the door, thinking she was in.

And would she be glad to be there! She was footsore and desperately tired. Her shoes were not made for walking, and she had walked at least six miles. Not George's fault, of course, that the car had broken down. They had abandoned it six miles back, and he'd left her at the end

of the lane to go to his own house.

Maybe he would have trouble explaining why he was so late. As she felt at the moment, she couldn't care less. The whole evening had gone sour. Next time she had an evening off she would stay in her room and read. Maybe she'd chuck her job. Service in the country wasn't much fun for a girl. Didn't give her much scope.

She closed the gate behind her. Good job the moon was shining, or she would have had trouble seeing the path. Must be one o'clock, she thought, and she should have been in at eleven. Who cared, anyway?

The mysterious voice from the shrubbery

She skirted the back of the summer-house, her footsteps making no sound on the grass.

It was then that she heard the voice, and it made her come to a sudden halt. It was a man's voice—she didn't know whose—and it came from inside the small building of logs in the shrubbery.

"Only the moon as witness," it said. "And the moon—well, he won't tell!"

She didn't wait to hear more. Curiosity nagged her, but the game wasn't worth the candle. Pretty fool she'd look if they came out and caught her listening.

She moved away, almost running. The house itself was in darkness. She skirted the terrace, went round to the back, found a window left open, and hastily climbed inside.

She hoped the master was sleeping soundly. Not for her own sake alone, but for his as well. He was a decent sort, and maybe what the eye didn't see the heart didn't grieve about, though sometimes she sort of wondered.

Goodness! But was she tired!

* * * * *

"This must be it," said Dixon Hawke. "There's a constable at the gate. And—yes! That's Baxter coming down the drive to meet us."

Tommy Burke, his youthful assistant, turned the car through the gateway, and stopped it just inside.

Next moment they were greeting Detective-Inspector Baxter, chief of the Flying Squad, Hawke's old rival and friend.

"I'm glad I was in when your message came through," said the

famous private detective. "What's the trouble here?"

"Murder," replied the Inspector. "They turned me out this morning just before nine o'clock. There are unusual points about the case, so I thought you'd like to be in on it. My bet is you'd have smelled it out if I hadn't phoned you. Sort of way you have."

Hawke smiled, but made no reply.

"Now we're down here," continued Baxter, "you might as well see the corpse. I'll give you the gen on it later."

He turned from the drive to a smaller path which skirted the estate—a not inconsiderable one—and led the way through the shrubbery to a summer-house built of logs.

The three of them moved with care, watching every step. Each knew how often clues are destroyed by carelessness in moving.

The body lay on the boarded floor of the summer-house. It was the body of a woman—a beautiful woman, too, in a brittle, sophisticated way. At least, Hawke thought, before she was dead she must have been beautiful. Now she was not so pretty!

"Strangulation," said Baxter. "Manual strangulation. Name was Carol Heard. Wife of the owner of the place."

Hawke stood looking down on the congested face.

"Doc. says between twelve and two o'clock," Baxter informed him shortly. "That's a guess, of course. With the body out all night, it's difficult to tell."

"Robbery wasn't the motive," Tommy Burke put in. "She's wear-

The Moon Cried "Murder!"

ing a platinum watch and a ring that didn't come from a bargain counter. That diamond pendant, too."

Hawke knelt at the body's side.

"She's only wearing one ear-ring," he commented. "The other isn't there."

Baxter grunted agreement.

"The ears aren't punctured," Dixon Hawke pointed out. "These are the screw-on type. See this?"

On the lobe of the ear was a half-inch scratch, like a red and angry line.

"Telling you what?" asked Tommy.

"Well! It didn't fall off," Hawke declared. "Scratching the ear that way, she'd have felt it if it had. It was pulled off, I should say. At a guess, by accident, at the moment she was killed."

He stood up and glanced around.

"You won't find it," Inspector Baxter grunted. "We've already searched high and low, here and outside, right up to the house. Not a sign of it."

"The murderer picked it up," Tommy suggested, "and put it in his pocket."

"Maybe," said Hawke thoughtfully.

"If so, he'll have got rid of it safely by now," Baxter sounded pessimistic. "If you've seen all you want to, come up to the house. The body was discovered, by the way, by an under-gardener at seven o'clock this morning, or a little before."

They went outside to the garden again.

"Footprints?" Dixon Hawke asked.

The Inspector nodded gloomily.

"You can see where they walked," he admitted. "But there's nothing of any value. Oddly enough, there are traces of another woman's footsteps at the back of the hut. But they may have been made any time at all in the last twenty-four hours."

"I'll look at them later," Hawke decided.

Gossip Clues

THEY went on up to the house.

A sergeant let them in, and they moved to a room on the right of the hall. It was a man's room, with comfortable leather armchairs, a flat-topped desk, and bookshelves well filled with volumes plainly used.

"The owner's den," said Inspector Baxter. "Sit down, and I'll tell you the little I've found out so far."

Dixon Hawke moved across to a chair.

"I've seen the servants," continued the Inspector. "Nothing much they can tell, but you get the feeling of the place best from the servants, I find. Apparently these two—Quentin and Carol Heard—were an ill-assorted couple. He was quiet and steady; always courteous and kind.

"She was a good deal younger—headstrong and self-willed. A bit wild, too, I imagine. In fact, her goings-on seemed to be known by everyone but her doting husband. If gossip can be believed, she's had half a dozen affairs in the last three years to enliven life in the countryside. There have been one or two near-scandals."

"You know what they say of the

What happened to the missing ear-ring?

worm," Tommy said. "Perhaps he turned at last—and put a stop to her games—for ever."

"It's a chance, of course," nodded Baxter. "Though why the summer-house in the early hours of the morning?"

"Followed her out to a rendezvous—and did the trick before her partner arrived," was Tommy's theory.

"It's a chance," the Inspector said again. "Last night, apparently, there were guests for dinner. Her guests, I understand. A certain Mr Hoffmeyer. Somewhere about forty, a bachelor—and attractive, I'd say, to a certain type of woman. He lives in a bungalow just down the road that runs at the end of the lane, and is looked after by a housekeeper."

"There was also a Mrs Marjorie Sterne. Apparently Mr Sterne as well should have been one of the party, but he had to go over to Colminster on business during the evening."

Baxter stopped to light his pipe—a rite requiring concentration, as Dixon Hawke very well knew. Once the tobacco was well alight, the Inspector continued:

"A couple of months ago, I believe, George Sterne was well in the running for the lady's favours. Hoffmeyer's taken his place of late. Maybe George was peeved. Enough, perhaps, to strangle her."

"It's been known before," agreed Hawke. "I take it these folk are all handy? If so, let's see them, shall we?"

The sergeant fetched Quentin Heard.

His tired face looked almost bloodless. His heavy shoulders

stooped, and his eyes looked a little haunted.

"Sit down," said Baxter gently. He could be surprisingly gentle at times.

He asked a number of routine questions.

"Now, tell us, Mr Heard," he said, "about what you did last night."

Quentin Heard passed a trembling hand across his forehead slowly.

"We dined at half-past seven," he said. "I—I didn't stay with the others after the meal was finished. I came along to this room. I saw none of the guests—nor my wife—again. I went up to bed early myself—at half-past ten, I'd say."

"Weren't you perturbed at all," asked Dixon Hawke, "when your wife didn't come to bed?"

A flush crossed Quentin Heard's face.

"For a long time now," he said slowly, "oh—for a couple of years!—my wife slept in her own room."

"I see," nodded Hawke. "Then you didn't even know she was missing till you were told this morning?"

"That is so," Heard agreed. "I was fetched out of bed at seven o'clock, and phoned the police at once."

"All right, Mr Heard," said the inspector. "We'll be wanting you again. But for the moment that is enough. And—don't think we're unsympathetic, but we have our job to do."

"Poor blighter!" he added quietly as the door closed behind Heard's back. "Or would you say he was?"

Nobody answered the question.

The Moon Cried "Murder!"

Next moment the sergeant appeared, after knocking at the door.

"Mr Hoffmeyer," he announced.

Hawke could see quite well how a woman of Carol Heard's type might fall heavily for Hoffmeyer. He was big and strong and virile. His face was a bit too fleshy, and his eyes just a bit too small, but he was handsome in a way.

"Mr Hoffmeyer?" Baxter asked.

"Ernst Hoffmeyer," the other said.

"Ernest?" Baxter queried.

"Not Ernest. Ernst," came the correction.

Dixon Hawke looked up sharply.

"Dutch? German?" he wanted to know.

Hoffmeyer grinned.

"German," he said. "Though I've been a naturalised British subject for more than fifteen years."

"But your boyhood was spent in Germany?" Hawke seemed oddly persistent.

"Right," came the ready agreement. "Lived there till I was twenty."

"I shouldn't have guessed it," said Inspector Baxter. "You haven't a trace of an accent. Must be a useful business asset speaking a couple of languages like a native. By the way, what did you say your business was?"

"I didn't," Hoffmeyer smiled. "But I'm a foreign produce merchant. I go up to town three times a week."

"Of course!" Baxter nodded, in no way put out. "And now—what about last night? You dined here, I understand."

"I did—with Marjorie Sterne.

Her George was busy some other place. Pretty dull evening all round. I left at eleven-thirty. So did Marjorie Sterne. We walked down the lane together. Then she turned left—and I right. I went home—to bed—and stayed there. Got routed out this morning by one of your constables."

"You didn't come out again, then," the inspector asked, "after you'd once got home?"

"What the blazes do you mean?" snapped Hoffmeyer.

"I asked you a question," said Baxter, unruffled, but very insistent.

"No, I didn't," Hoffmeyer admitted sullenly.

"You dressed for dinner, I take it?" Dixon Hawke put in.

Hoffmeyer looked surprised.

"I was wearing a dinner suit," he said coldly. "Isn't it the custom in the circles you frequent?"

"I was asking the questions," Dixon Hawke said, as unruffled as Baxter had been.

"All right," Baxter growled. "You can go. We'll be wanting you again. Sergeant, take him back to the others. And show Mrs Sterne in, please."

Trapped by a Turn-up

REMEMBERING the gossip of the servants, Tommy Burke privately thought Marjorie Sterne handicapped somewhat, compared with Carol Heard, if it came to holding husbands. She was just a little bit homely.

She added very little to what they already knew; confirmed Hoffmeyer's time of leaving, and their

A late night for the principal suspect

joint walk to the end of the lane. "Your husband was out last night, I believe?" Inspector Baxter asked.

"That's right," the woman replied. "He'd been invited here, of course. He intended to come till the afternoon. Then he had a phone call, fixing up some business appointment at Colminster. Some editor, I believe. My husband's a writer, you know."

"Had he returned when you got back?" Baxter asked her quietly.

Hawke thought she hesitated a split second before replying.

"No," she said. "He hadn't."

"What time did he return?"

"I—I don't quite know," she said. "I—er—pottered a little—and went to bed. I woke when he arrived, but I didn't look at the time."

"Did you think it was late?" asked Baxter. "That is, was it your impression that you had slept for quite a while?"

"It's—it's hard to say," she answered. "He was later than he intended. You see—his car broke down when he was coming home. He had to abandon it and walk. And George always hated walking."

"I've known other writers like that," the inspector surprisingly said. "So, for all you know, your husband may not have got back till, say, two o'clock this morning?"

There was fear showing in her eyes. She knew well enough where these questions were tending.

"Oh, it—it wasn't as late as that," she declared.

"But you don't really know?" said Baxter.

"No," she said miserably.

The sergeant escorted her out again, and brought her husband back.

George Sterne looked a little seedy. Perhaps writing did not pay like dealing in foreign produce—or anything else, for that matter. But he was a big man, like Hoffmeyer, and, given a good night's rest, and a little smartening even, would have been passable-looking enough.

"We understand," began Baxter, "that you had to break your engagement to dine here last night with your wife on account of a business call."

"Quite correct," George Sterne nodded. He seemed a little ill at ease. "A friend rang me up yesterday afternoon. I hadn't known he was in Colminster. As I wanted to see him, I thought the chance too good a one to miss."

"I see," said Baxter. "And you met him—where?"

"In—in the Green Dragon," Sterne replied.

"Anyone else there that you knew?" Baxter asked casually.

Sterne looked at him sharply, then shook his head.

"Pity," said the inspector. "By the way, what was this friend's name?"

There was no doubt about it at all this time that there was palpable hesitation.

"Er—John Roberts," Sterne said at last.

"His address?" Baxter pressed.

"His permanent address, I mean."

"His address?"

George Sterne seemed uncertain.

"Yes! His address," snapped the

The Moon Cried "Murder!"

inspector. "You know it, I suppose? Look here, Mr Sterne, I'm inquiring into a brutal murder. It was committed—as far as we know—between twelve and two o'clock—and your wife says you got home very late after abandoning your car."

George Sterne licked his lips. Then he looked round the room as though to check up who was there.

"Look here, Inspector," he managed at last. "I'll tell you all about it. But—for the love of Mike, if you can, keep it away from the wife. Not that I deserve it, of course. As a matter of fact, the phone call I got yesterday afternoon was from Mrs Heard's personal maid. She's—well, I think she's attractive. I've—I've been seeing her, off and on, for the last two or three months, and——"

He plainly found it difficult to continue his tale.

"I met her last night by arrangement," he said in a rush at last. "Took her into Colminster. We went to the pictures there, then had a bit of supper. I should have been back by eleven—indoors before the wife returned—but my car chose to break down.

"We hoofed it for nearly six miles. I guess I learned quite a lot I didn't know before about Annie Stubbins' character during that six-mile hike. Enough to make me certain I don't want to see her again."

He took out a handkerchief and wiped perspiration from his forehead.

"We reached the bottom of the lane at about one o'clock," he declared. "I went straight home to bed. Annie was going to slip in

through the small gate in the lane. That's what she did, for all I know."

"And you're sure you went straight home?" Baxter asked. "You didn't watch her go, and then keep another appointment in the summer-house?"

"No!" said George Sterne. "No!"

Baxter might have believed him. On the other hand, he might not. You couldn't tell from his face. At least, Hawke thought, the story explained the other woman's footprints—corroboration of the tale.

"Sergeant, take Mr Sterne away, and bring me Annie Stubbins," Baxter said non-committally.

Scared into answering truthfully by the inspector's ferocious manner—he could be fierce as well as gentle—Annie Stubbins confirmed Sterne's tale to the time of the separation.

Then she brought Baxter up with a jerk as she told of the voice she had heard coming from the summer-house.

"Good grief!" he said. "A thousand to one you heard the murderer. You knew his voice, I hope."

She shook her head.

"Not a chance," she declared. "You are hearing a voice like that from inside, and you wouldn't know it, not if it was your own mother. Though this was a man, of course."

"What were those words that you heard?" Hawke asked.

The girl looked a little confused. She was scared—and badly so.

"It—the voice—said," she replied uncertainly, creasing her face to a frown: "Only the moon as witness. And the moon—well, he

The tell-tale moon betrayed a murderer

won't tell.' Sippy, if you ask me."

"You're sure of those words?"
Hawke insisted.

"'Course I am." She was indignant.

Hawke moved away to the window. He was looking very thoughtful. He did not even turn round again when Annie Stubbins went out.

"Well?" grunted Baxter crossly.

"I suppose it's all perfectly plain?"

"I think so—yes," said Hawke quietly. "But I don't know if we can prove it."

Hawke turned with sudden decision.

"You keep them here all together," he said. "I'm going out for a while. I'll be back as soon as I can. Not long—if I'm very lucky."

He was back in just over the hour. He found Baxter glumly pacing the length of the terrace lounge, with George and Marjorie Sterne, Hoffmeyer, and Annie Stubbins sitting silent and uncomfortable in widely-separated chairs.)

Baxter sighed with relief at Dixon Hawke's appearance.

"And have you been lucky?" he asked.

"Very," Dixon Hawke said. "It was that earring I was after. If it dropped, as we suspected, then the murderer might not have known anything about it if it lodged in some part of his clothes—say, the turn-up of his trousers!"

"Good grief!" said Baxter. "Yes! And—and tell me——"

He broke off short. Hawke was holding out his hand. On the palm of it lay the earring.

"I found it in the turn-up of a

pair of grey flannel trousers," he said soberly. "That was luck again. If he hadn't changed from his dinner suit before going out again we'd never have proved it at all, maybe. A dinner-suit has no turn-ups. It would have dropped to the floor."

"But — whose?" the inspector demanded.

"Hoffmeyer's," said Dixon Hawke. "Better watch him, sergeant!"

"But you knew where to look," accused Baxter. "You went straight to the right man's house. How did you know who it was?"

"Annie told me," said Dixon Hawke.

"Annie?" broke in Tommy Burke.

"What do you mean?"

"The habits and speech of childhood remain even when we are adult," Dixon Hawke declared. "Remember what the murderer said? 'Only the moon as witness. And the moon—well, he won't tell.' Only in German, Tommy, is the moon referred to as 'he'."

Under questioning later, Hoffmeyer confessed his guilt. He had killed in a sudden fit of rage, when he found that Carol Heard had arranged the summer-house meeting only to give him his dismissal. She had done it with brutal directness. She was sick of the sight of him. That is what she declared. He had expected caresses and kisses. He had taken a slap in the face—and a mortal wound to his pride.

He had gone blind with rage, so he told them. When he came to himself his hands were round the woman's throat—and the woman, he found, was dead.

THE CASE OF *THE* *TIDY* SERVANT



A Delicate Problem

"I'VE come to you, Mr Hawke, instead of calling in the police because"—the speaker paused—"well, I've an uncomfortable idea that personalities may be involved, requiring the use of the utmost tact and discretion, and the avoidance of publicity."

Dixon Hawke eyed his caller curiously across the wide-topped desk, on either side of which they were seated in the comfortable consulting-room.

"In other words, Mr Spinney, you fear that—er—friends of yours may be implicated?"

"That's about it," he admitted. "And, if so—though I just hate to

think it—I shouldn't want to prosecute. I'd have to if it were a police job, wouldn't I?"

"I'm afraid so," was the detective's quiet reply. "But supposing you let me have all the details."

"Right you are, Mr Hawke. I'm a stockbroker by profession, and a fairly successful one, so I can afford to meet the rising cost of living plus taxation, and still have a bit left over to indulge my pet hobby, which happens to be pictures. D'you know anything about pictures?"

"You mean works of art, of

The neglected masterpiece in a second-hand shop

course?" smiled Hawke. "I'm not an expert, but I take an interest in them."

"Well," — the other leaned forward impressively—"how much would you say a genuine Corot would be worth these days?"

"A genuine Corot?" repeated the detective. "If such a thing were obtainable today, I should say its value would be anything from seven hundred and fifty to five thousand pounds, or even more depending upon the size of the canvas."

"You're about right," was the rejoinder. "So you can imagine how I felt when, prowling round a small, second-hand place just off Piccadilly a few days ago, I discovered what I was certain was an example of the great French artist's best work. I had the shock of my life, especially when I realised that the chap who was selling it didn't have the faintest idea of its real worth."

Spinney made a wry grimace.

"I dare say you'll want to rap me over the knuckles for taking advantage of the situation, but—well, a deal's a deal to me, whether on the 'Change or anywhere else. Guess how much I paid for that picture—a genuine Corot landscape, Mr Hawke?"

Dixon Hawke shook his head.

"Under the circumstances, I won't even try to guess. You tell me."

"Twenty pounds," stated Spinney. "As I've said, the fellow in the shop had no idea of its value. Goodness only knows where he got it from, but that's no concern of mine. Obviously he knew nothing

at all about pictures, whereas I know a great deal. He was quite satisfied with the sum I offered, so everyone was happy."

Tommy Burke, the famous detective's young assistant, who was in an armchair near the window, gave a low whistle and sat up with a jerk.

"I should say so!" he gasped. "Happy—to pick up something for twenty quid that might be worth thousands. And they say the age of miracles is past!"

Their visitor smiled.

"That's how it is sometimes, youngster." He became suddenly serious again. "But that's only the beginning. I took the picture home with me and hung it in the lounge of my house."

"Last night I invited a couple of friends of mine, who are also keenly interested in art, to have dinner with me and gloat over my find. They're experts themselves, and they both agreed that the picture was genuine."

"Their names?" inquired Hawke.

"Arthur Vincent and Hubert Walsh," was the reply. "I've known them both for years, and they were almost as excited as I was. They stayed until nearly half-past eleven, and went off congratulating me on my good luck."

In the pause that followed, Dixon Hawke asked:

"Did anyone else know of your purchase, and its real value?"

"Only my man, Collins. He helped me select the place to hang it. He wouldn't have known what it was worth, of course, but I dare say he'd realise from my

The Case of the Tidy Servant

reactions that the thing was valuable. He's absolutely in my confidence, and straight as a die. I'd trust him anywhere, and he's been with me for ages. Otherwise, I didn't mention the matter to a single soul."

"I see. Well, continue your story, Mr Spinney."

The stockbroker's face clouded slightly.

"This part isn't so good. After Vincent and Walsh had gone, I did a spot of work in the library until just past midnight. Then I switched off the light and left the room."

"Your man had already retired?"

"Yes. He brought me a drink into the library when I went there, and I told him I wouldn't want him any more."

"Right. And after that——?"

"On my way to bed," continued Spinney, "I looked into the bathroom. I suffer from a mild form of indigestion, and usually take a dose of bisurated magnesia last thing at night. The stuff is kept in the bathroom cabinet, but when I pressed the light switch there was a splutter and a spasmodic flicker, then darkness. The lamp filament had apparently gone, but I knew where to find what I wanted."

"I took the bottle of magnesia away with me and had my dose in my bedroom. A few minutes later I was between the sheets, and it never takes me long to fall asleep."

"The next thing I knew it was daylight, and someone was thumping on the door. I called, 'Come in!' and in rushed Collins with a face the colour of putty. For a

moment or two all he could do was stand and gibber at me, then at last he blurted out that—my picture—the valuable Corot landscape—had been stolen during the night!

"I could hardly believe it, but sprang out of bed and flew to the lounge, still in my pyjamas. It was true enough. I stared up at the wall where, only a few hours before, my newly-found treasure had hung. Frame and all, the picture had been removed from its place, and all that confronted me was a blank and empty space!"

Frederick Spinney drew a deep breath.

"Frankly, I don't know what to think. There are signs, which you will see if you agree to investigate this case for me, that an entrance was forced from outside. Yet the only ones who knew I had that picture in the house, and what it was worth, were——"

"Your two friends, Vincent and Walsh," put in Dixon Hawke.

"But, dash it all!" exclaimed Spinney. "They wouldn't either of them do a thing like this—I mean, break into a house just like a common thief and——"

The detective stroked his chin.

"I appreciate your loyalty on behalf of these men, Mr Spinney. But at the beginning of this interview you stated your reasons for coming to see me instead of reporting your loss to the police. Those reasons make it clear that, in spite of your protestations, your mind is not at ease."

"I—I suppose not," assented Spinney miserably. "Anyway, Mr Hawke, will you look into the

Clues galore by the open window!

matter, please? All I want is to get my Corot back, if possible, without any fuss or publicity."

Dixon Hawke rose.

"Very well, I shall do my best. I'll come round within the next hour or two, and in the meantime, perhaps you'll give me the addresses of your two friends? I'll probably want to have a few words with each of them in due course."

Tell-Tale Strands

TWO hours later Dixon Hawke and his assistant were looking in their turn upon the place where once had been hanging an example of the matchless genius of the celebrated French painter, Corot. Beside them its late owner stood, silent and crestfallen.

Hawke turned away at last.

"You say there are indications as to how the thief or thieves gained access to the house?"

"Yes," replied Spinney. "It's clear enough—they got in through the bathroom window. Come and see for yourselves."

All three left the lounge and walked upstairs together. In the bathroom Spinney pointed to the open window.

"That's just as we found it after the discovery of the theft. Nothing's been touched."

Hawke nodded approval. He pointed to several articles which lay on the floor, close to a small table upon which they had apparently once stood.

"The intruder did this, I gather? Made a bit of a mess, didn't he?"

In a little heap there were a half-

packet of razor blades, a towel, a new cake of soap, and an open bottle of talcum powder, most of which was scattered on the floor. The cap of the bottle had been trodden underfoot amongst the powder.

"Bloke obviously didn't know his way about," contributed Tommy Burke, "and didn't want to risk switching on the light."

"He couldn't have done so," was Spinney's reminder. "I told you that when I tried to use the light myself last night I found that the lamp had gone phut."

Hawke indicated three or four spent match-ends at the foot of the window.

"The thief didn't bother to try the switch at all."

He carefully examined the window. The fastening was of the usual type, and had been forced by the time-honoured method of inserting the blade of a penknife between the frames—the scratches, clean and new, bore ample evidence of this. Against the rough edge of the window-frame the detective's keen eyes espied a few shreds of dark material—grey cloth of some woollen texture, he judged it to be. Without a word he removed the strands carefully, and, wrapping them in a small piece of paper, placed them in his pocket-book.

There were a few traces of damp earth just below the window, and, looking out, the detective saw that it gave directly on to the side of the house. A gravel path led away for some distance, and skirted round to the front.

Dixon Hawke heaved himself up

The Case of the Tidy Servant

and dropped lightly from the window-sill, followed immediately by Tommy Burke. Outside they noted with satisfaction that the thief had left more than sufficient traces of his visit. It had rained heavily the night before, and two sets of footprints were visible, both from the same pair of feet—one set leading towards the bathroom window, and the other away from it.

They traced the footprints to the edge of a small plot of grass leading to the street gate. Then they turned and walked back to the house.

In the lounge once more, they found Frederick Spinney.

"Could I ask your man, Collins, a question or two?" suggested Dixon Hawke.

"Of course," Spinney nodded. "I'll ring for him."

He pressed a nearby button.

"By the way, excuse my curiosity, but it's purely professional—isn't it rather unusual for two—er—men to live alone in a place this size?" queried Dixon Hawke.

"You aren't the only one to remark that," smiled Spinney. "Yes, I suppose it is. You see, this house belonged to an uncle of mine who left it to me when he died. I liked the place and decided to live in it. But I'm a bachelor—women don't appeal to me greatly, and so far marriage hasn't held out any attractions.

"I've a daily woman who comes first thing in the morning and remains all day doing various necessary jobs. She goes away usually after dinner, at about half-past seven, and there's always

Collins about to do anything else I may want done. Ah, there he is now."

A man of portly build and medium height, every inch the "gentleman's gentleman," was advancing deferentially.

"You rang, sir?" he queried.

"Yes, Collins. This is Mr Dixon Hawke, the famous detective, who's looking into the matter of my loss. He'd like to ask you a few questions."

"There are just two things I'd like you to tell me, Collins," said the detective pleasantly. "First of all—you heard no strange, suspicious or unusual sounds during the night?"

Collins shook his head.

"No, sir. But, as it happens, my own quarters are some distance from the—er—miscreant's point of entry and from the lounge, so unless such sounds were particularly loud——"

"I understand," nodded Hawke.

"The second thing is this—could you say whether this woman who comes in to do the daily chores was aware of the nature and value of the picture that hung upon the wall there?"

"Mrs Dawkins certainly knew of the picture, sir."

"Quite. And she knew what it was worth?"

"Not exactly, sir. I may have informed her that my master set some value upon it, but was unable to estimate what such value might be."

"Naturally. Well, that's all, I think, Collins."

"Thank you, sir."

The butler withdrew.

The secret of the overcoat with the frayed sleeve

Tommy Burke burst out—
"Gosh, Guv'nor! You don't think——"

"Ridiculous!" exclaimed Spinney.
"Why, Mrs Dawkins couldn't——"

"I haven't suggested that she stole the picture," interjected Hawke mildly. "But it is not impossible that she might have spoken about it to others in her own circle. In which case——"

"Oh! You mean——"

"I mean that information concerning something of probable value, fairly accessible, may not have been so confined as you at first supposed. But we shall see."

Hawke's Bombshell

LEAVING Spinney's house, Dixon Hawke set out to interview Messrs Arthur Vincent and Hubert Walsh.

He called on Walsh first, but found him out and not expected back for a couple of hours. Hawke therefore made his way to where the other man lived, and there was admitted by a trim maid.

"Yes, sir. Mr Vincent is at home. Please step inside and I'll tell him you're here."

The detective followed as he was led to a sitting-room on the left of the hall. As he passed he caught sight of an overcoat with two or three hats upon the hallstand. The overcoat was of dark grey material, and Hawke's brows furrowed thoughtfully.

No sooner had the maid left him alone than he darted from the sitting-room into the hall. There he made straight for the hallstand

and subjected the overcoat to a swift scrutiny.

The left sleeve was slightly frayed, and the detective knew, without troubling to make the comparison, that the strands now in his pocket-book were similar in texture. Moreover, they had been found on the left of the window frame of Spinney's bathroom—the left, that is, for anyone attempting to climb inside.

When Arthur Vincent put in an appearance he found Dixon Hawke waiting patiently for him in the sitting-room. He made no secret of his surprise at being interviewed by the famous detective. He was, however, completely staggered at the news of his friend, Spinney's, loss. Not for one moment did it occur to him that he was suspect in the matter, and even when at last Hawke posed him a direct question he refused to take the situation seriously.

"Where was I during the small hours?" he laughed. "My dear sir, I've got a perfect alibi—I was safely tucked up in bed. And if it isn't indelicate to suggest it, I suggest that you apply to my wife for corroboration of that fact. No," he finished blandly, "if you've got any notion that I pinched that lucky blighter's picture I'm afraid you must think again!"

Five minutes later Dixon Hawke had taken leave of Vincent, and finding himself still too early to hope to catch his other suspect he went into a restaurant for a cup of tea.

When finally he ran Rupert Walsh to earth he discovered that

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that individual, like Frederick Spinney, was also a bachelor, who rented a small, self-contained flat, but was obviously not so affluent as his friend. In contrast to Arthur Vincent, Welsh was decidedly perturbed when he heard what the detective had to tell him. He was in still more of a dither when requested to account for his movements since leaving Spinney's house the previous night.

"Hang it all!" he burst out angrily. "I don't know anything about the affair. I don't spend my nights going round stealing other people's property — especially if they happen to be friends of mine! If you must know, I slept from just after midnight until seven-thirty this morning.

"My landlady can vouch for the time I came in, and that I was in my room this morning. I dare say I could have left the house easily enough in between had I wanted to. But I didn't—so you must make the best you can of that!"

Hawke, who had been carefully studying the other while he was making this statement, appeared satisfied, and after a further brief conversation took his leave.

The detective was more than ordinarily pensive as he retraced his footsteps to Frederick Spinney's house. On arrival there he found his client at home.

"I'd like to ask Collins just one further question," said Dixon Hawke. "Is he available?"

Spinney nodded.

"Yes, he must be somewhere around. We'll get him here at once."

Summoned to the lounge, the

butler stood inquiringly before them. Hawke looked at him fixedly for a moment then said:—

"Collins, why did you steal your master's picture?"

Frederick Spinney uttered an exclamation of amazement, and the butler's face flushed then went deathly pale.

"S-sir!" he stuttered. "I—I—you——" He strove to regain his composure. "You're making a terrible mistake."

Dixon Hawke pointed to a chair.

"Sit down, Collins, and let's get this straight. It's no use trying to bluff me, man. I know what happened."

Something in the detective's tone must have convinced the butler that denials would be useless, and, whether or no, he was not of the stuff of which criminals are made. He suddenly collapsed into the chair, burying his face in his hands.

Spinney stared from Hawke to his servant and back again.

"Look here," he gasped, "what the dickens does all this mean?"

Dixon Hawke shrugged.

"It means, I regret to say, that for some reason best known to himself, Collins succumbed to the temptation to steal your picture, and planned to make the theft look like an outside job. Unfortunately for him he isn't used to crime, and his effort was an extremely clumsy one. I had my suspicions, in fact, within a few minutes of my investigations here, although verification on one point was necessary.

"What first set me thinking was that bottle of talcum powder which had been spilled on the bathroom

A crook's blunder—he tidied up his own clues!

floor, and the cap of which had been crushed underfoot. In such circumstances there should have been signs of powdered footprints both inside and outside the house.

"It was clear that whoever had planned the theft had noticed the powdered footmarks his accident had caused, leaving impressions inside the house. Such marks he had gone to the trouble of removing—a needless precaution on the part of anyone who had taken no care to obliterate the prints he must have known he had made on the ground outside the bathroom window and which are still plainly visible.

"Indications thus being that the job was actually an inside one, there was only Collins to come under suspicion. Those footprints in the earth he had made, probably wearing shoes other than his own. In the bathroom the electric light was not functioning, therefore he was compelled to work faking the signs of forced entry by the light of matches.

"Doubtless he had knocked over the articles on the table near the window quite accidentally, but decided to leave them as further evidence of a break-in from outside. But he should have taken away the crushed cap of the talcum bottle, and at least have swept up the powder!"

Frederick Spinney passed a hand across his brow.

"I—I can scarcely believe it. You said just now that there was one point needing verification. What was that?"

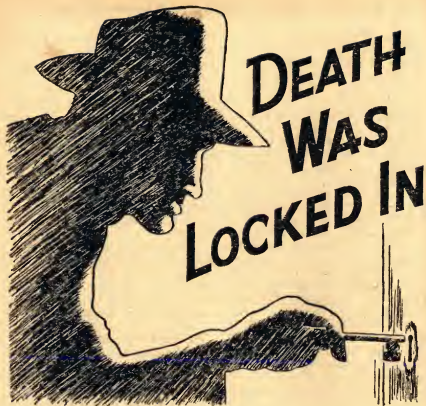
"With calculated callousness Collins endeavoured to throw sus-

picion on Arthur Vincent, one of your guests last night, by placing on a conspicuous part of the window-frame some strands of material which he had removed earlier in the evening from Vincent's overcoat whilst it hung in the hall. These strands I discovered adhering to the frame and they puzzled me greatly.

"Calling upon Vincent today, I saw his overcoat hanging on his own hallstand and took the opportunity of examining it. I noticed that one of the sleeves was frayed, and also that the fraying had been caused by a small slit having been cut in the cloth with a pair of scissors, or a sharp penknife—the cut was about half an inch long and quite clean at the edges. Very little deduction was required to fit this discovery to my already conceived theory."

Under further pressure the butler confessed that he had, indeed, stolen the Corot. He was considerably in debt to various bookmakers, and, while having no notion of the true value of the picture, he realised that he might be able to dispose of it for a sum sufficient to clear his debts. Dixon Hawke, however, lost no time in pointing out to him how exceedingly precarious such an attempt on his part would have been.

Frederick Spinney, badly shaken at the revelation of such treachery in one he had trusted, refused to prosecute, since the picture was later found hidden away in Collins' own rooms. The latter was, of course, discharged from service, and could consider himself extremely lucky to get off so lightly, especially since he had tried to incriminate an innocent person.



Baxter is Stumped

"I'VE come across some queer cases in my time, Hawke, but this is the worst," remarked Detective-Inspector Baxter, Chief of the Flying Squad, as he stood near the fireplace in the famous detective's comfortable study. "It just doesn't make sense. A murdered man in a locked room and nothing to show how the killer got in or out. It's just crazy."

Dixon Hawke smiled sympathetically.

"Give Inspector Baxter a cigar," he said to Tommy Burke, his youthful assistant. "And push that easy chair nearer the window. Now, then, Baxter, if you'll sit down and give me all the details I'll see if I can think of anything that will help."

"But I must say I don't feel too hopeful. From what you say, the crime was committed three days ago, and a delay of three days in a murder case is just three days too long. Why didn't you let me know earlier?"

Closed doors were no barrier to the mystery killer

"Well," Baxter muttered uncomfortably, "you see——"

"You had it all lined up, then something happened which destroyed your confidence," guessed Dixon Hawke. "Is that it?"

Baxter ceased his contemplation of the glowing end of his cigar to raise his head and smile wryly.

"You're uncanny," he said. "The fact is I thought I had my hands on the murderer, then he produced an alibi which I haven't been able to break. The trouble really began for us last Tuesday morning, when, at seven o'clock, Ronald Melville, the novelist, was found shot dead in his study at Dorminster Grange. It's an old house standing in its own extensive grounds about sixty miles north-west of London. He had been shot through the head."

"It couldn't have been suicide?" asked Hawke.

"No. He had been shot from behind, and there was no trace of the weapon."

"What was he doing in his study at seven o'clock in the morning? Was he an early riser?"

"No. Apparently he was used to working late at night and going to bed at two or three in the morning. There had been a card party the night before which ended somewhere around ten-thirty. Melville lost, as usual—his wife tells me that he was not very lucky at cards—and, after a light supper he told her that he was going to his study to finish some writing which was on his mind. She heard him lock himself in, and that was the last time she saw him alive."

"Why lock himself in, par-

ticularly at that time of night?" asked Hawke. "Surely he wouldn't be disturbed so late?"

Baxter frowned.

"I thought of that. I thought it might mean that he was afraid of something, but his wife said no, it was just one of his habits. Apparently a maid had gone into his study late one night to turn off the light, which she thought he had left burning, and he was so annoyed by the interruption that he always locked himself in after that."

"Temperamental, eh?" mused Hawke.

"Very. He had a violent temper, and would fly into a rage on the slightest provocation. I got that from his secretary, a man called Norman Bird, who had been given a month's notice the day before."

"Why?"

"I'm not sure. Bird told me that it was because some proofs had been mislaid. His employer flew into a rage, accused him of inefficiency, and fired him. The same afternoon the proofs were discovered under a pile of old papers on Melville's desk, but Melville did not reverse his decision. Instead, according to Bird, the fact that he had been put in the wrong seemed only to feed Melville's rage, and he went on working with ill-concealed fury."

"An interesting sidelight on the production of great literature—Melville's work is extremely well thought of in intellectual circles—but it hardly helps to explain why he was murdered. No doubt you thought that it did."

"I thought that Bird might have killed him," admitted Baxter, "but

he has an alibi. He was so angry with Melville that he refused to stay in the house at night. He booked a room at the village inn, and the landlord swears that Bird was there on the night Melville was murdered."

"I suppose he could have left his room at night without being observed," murmured Hawke, "but I shouldn't have thought that his dismissal was sufficient reason by itself to make him murder Melville."

After looking at his watch Baxter threw the stub of his cigar into the fire.

"Then you'll come down to Dorminster Grange?"

Hawke nodded.

"Call for us shortly after lunch," he suggested. "Tommy will have the car ready. You can take the lead in the squad car and show us the way."

Mrs Melville's Story

MRS MELVILLE was a blonde in her early thirties, whose attractiveness was not diminished by her newly-acquired mourning clothes. She received Hawke and Baxter in the drawing-room at Dorminster Grange, and answered their questions with perfect composure.

She might, Hawke thought, have been receiving visitors engaged on a purely social call, instead of investigation into a murder which was as brutal as it was baffling. Of course, her composure might be the normal attitude of a well-bred woman who, though confronted with an unexpected tragedy, is, nevertheless, determined to keep her

true feelings under strict control in the presence of strangers. On the other hand, it might be due to indifference. Dixon Hawke decided to seize the first opportunity of finding out.

"Tell me, Mrs Melville," he said. "Can you suggest anyone who might have wanted to kill your husband? Had he, as far as you know, any enemies?"

"He had few friends. Perhaps that is a better way of putting it," she answered frankly.

"I don't want to distress you," declared Hawke, "but could you tell me why?"

"Well, he was moody—unpredictable is perhaps the better word. Some days he would be in a good humour, and at other times—if his work were going badly or he had suffered a real or fancied insult—he would be morose and unapproachable."

Hawke nodded sympathetically.

"Perhaps it was due to the strain of his work?" he suggested. "The artistic temperament?"

"Maybe," she agreed in a carefully-neutral voice. "He was almost always working. A game of cards in the evening was his only relaxation, and I don't think that that was good for him. He couldn't bear to lose—and he almost always did, either to Norman or to Francis."

"Norman is Norman Bird, your husband's secretary?"

"He was. My husband fired him in one of his stupid rages. It was so unfair, because it wasn't Norman's fault. But doubtless the Inspector has told you about that."

"And Francis?" asked Hawke.

Interesting evidence from an attractive widow

"Is Sir Francis Llangelly. We bought this house from him. It had been in his family for generations, but he had to sell because of death duties. He now lives in a small detached house about five miles from here. You probably passed it on your way down."

"He was a friend of your husband's?"

"Yes, I suppose he was. They seemed to get on fairly well together, and my husband gave him an open invitation to visit the old place. They weren't exactly suited socially—my husband affected to despise him because he is content to live on his dwindling capital—but they had a mutual interest in cards and gossip about the county folk."

"I think my husband sometimes used what Sir Francis told him as material for his particular brand of satire. He once told me that he had thought of putting Sir Francis into one of his books, but had changed his mind because he doubted whether the man was worth it."

Hawke smiled and rose.

"I'm greatly obliged to you for your very honest and lucid account," he said. "There's one last question, and I hope you won't think it impertinent. Your husband was by way of being a rich man, and I assume that you will be the chief beneficiary-under his will."

"That's right, Mr Hawke," she answered without hesitation. "Was that the awkward question?"

She sounded relieved.

Hawke shook his head.

"No, Mrs Melville, it wasn't. This is the question—Were you in love with your husband?"

"Really, Mr Hawke!" Mrs Melville rose and gave the famous detective a look which was meant to intimidate but which failed.

"I'm waiting," he said coolly.

She sat down and lowered her gaze.

"All right," she said defiantly, "what if we didn't get on? That doesn't mean that I killed him. Or are you suggesting that I murdered him for his money?"

"I'm not suggesting anything," replied the private detective. "That is all for the moment, Mrs Melville. Will you tell Mr Bird that I'd like to see him next? And thank you for being so helpful."

Mrs Melville smiled ironically and left the room. When the door closed behind her, Baxter asked—

"Do you think she did it? It's the only motive we've had so far. And did you notice that she called that secretary fellow by his first name? Do you think that she and the secretary—?"

Hawke shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't think anything—yet."

He turned as the door opened, and asked, "Mr Bird?"

The young man in the neat blue suit, white shirt, and red and white tie nodded, then sat down.

"I understand that you want to question me, Mr Hawke, though I doubt whether I can be of much help. I wasn't here when the murder was committed."

"So I've been told. What time did you go down to the village?"

"About ten-forty-five. Mr Melville went to his room about ten-thirty, and his wife gave me a drink and a sandwich before I left."

Death Was Locked In

"She saw you leave?"

"Yes. Sir Francis gave me a lift down in his car. He had to pass the inn on his way home."

"Odd, wasn't it, that you should stay so late when relations were strained between you and Melville?"

Bird's expression hardened.

"I didn't stay to please him, I assure you, but I had promised Mrs Melville to make up a four at bridge, and I couldn't let her down."

"What were your relations with Mrs Melville?" Dixon Hawke demanded bluntly.

The young man took the question without apparent offence.

"Nothing abnormal. Mrs Melville was a woman who couldn't live without constant admiration—I suppose you've noticed that—and her husband was jealous of her. I suppose that when she married him she thought it an achievement to become the partner of a man with an international literary reputation, but she grew bored with life in this big old house. It was too far from London and her Mayfair set.

"She tried to flirt with me, but I wasn't interested. I'm not suggesting that she was anything more than gay and frivolous, but she wasn't my type."

"What about Sir Francis?"

"Oh, she flirted with him, too, in an innocent sort of way—if you call that attitude innocent. It was just her way of relieving boredom."

"It sounds an unpleasant sort of household," declared Baxter.

"It was. I'll be glad to leave."

"One final question," said Hawke. "What kind of book was Melville writing when he died?"

Bird looked startled.

"Funny you should ask that. It was his autobiography. I only noticed this morning that it has vanished."

"When did you see it last?"

"On the day of his death."

"Mislaid, perhaps?"

"I don't know. There was a carbon copy, and that's gone, too."

"Were both copies kept in Melville's study?"

"Yes, in a drawer of his desk."

"Locked?"

"No."

"Then anyone could have taken them?"

"Anyone who could get into the room."

"The murderer, for instance?"

"I suppose so, but I can't understand why."

"I suppose you typed the manuscript? Was there anything unusual in it—anything to justify murder?"

"I don't think so. Melville used to talk about it a great deal. I remember hearing him say once that, if it did not make his reputation, it would at least destroy plenty of others. But I can't remember typing anything to justify such an extravagant statement. I put it down to his sardonic humour."

"But he made no secret of what you call his extravagant claims for the book?"

"No, he seemed to delight in it. He even encouraged newspaper gossip paragraphs about the book. Do you see anything significant in that, Mr Hawke?"

Hawke smiled and refused to be drawn.

Hawke wipes his finger—and discovers a vital clue!

"Let me know if either of the typescripts turn up," he said.

A Trap is Set

WHEN Bird had gone, Dixon Hawke rose to his feet and remarked, "Now for the locked room, Baxter."

The room in which Melville had been murdered was large and square. It was centrally heated, and there was no fireplace. Three of its walls were lined with books, and french windows opened on to the lawn.

In the centre of the room was an enormous, old-fashioned desk—17th century, thought Hawke—and alongside it was a revolving bookstand and two steel filing cabinets. The floor was made of polished wooden blocks, and there was no carpet. The body had been removed, but its position—near one of the wall bookshelves—had been chalked on the floor.

"It looks as if he was taken un-awares while checking a reference," said Hawke. He ran a long finger across the shelf, and added, "There hasn't been a duster on here for weeks."

"He wouldn't allow the servants in here," explained Baxter. "Too much of value in the place."

Hawke went carefully round the room. There was a film of dust over everything, including the floor, but behind the desk was a cleaner semicircle.

Hawke bent over it for a moment and touched a dark spot on the polished surface of one of the wooden blocks. When he rubbed his finger with a handkerchief it left a greasy stain.

"Got something?" asked Baxter. "Yes—and no! I've discovered something which doesn't make sense at the moment. What lies under this room?"

"The wine cellar."

Hawke turned swiftly.

"I'd like to have a look at it."

"I can't see it helping you much. Even if it were used by the murderer, it doesn't explain how he got into the locked room."

"Perhaps not, but I'm going to look, all the same. Meanwhile, I want you to have an announcement inserted in tomorrow morning's newspapers to the effect that a further search of Melville's room has revealed a complete manuscript of Melville's autobiography."

"Say that it makes some sensational disclosures about many literary, artistic and aristocratic celebrities, and that as soon as it is typed it will go to the publishers."

"But what's it all about?" demanded Baxter. "You haven't found any manuscript, have you?"

"No, but I hope to find the man or woman who killed Melville. Meet me here tomorrow night at eleven o'clock, and bring a gun with you."

"You'll have to explain our presence here to Mrs Melville by the need for reconstructing the crime. That should satisfy her."

The following night, shortly before eleven, Hawke, Baxter and Tommy arrived at Dorminster Grange, and were admitted by Mrs Melville.

Hawke wondered if she would refer to the report, displayed prominently in that morning's newspapers, about the discovery of the manuscript, but she did not. Instead, she said:

Death Was Locked In

"I've had a flask of coffee and some sandwiches placed on a tray outside the study. They'll keep you fortified in your task."

"You're very kind," murmured Hawke.

She left them with a bried nod, and they went down the corridor to the study, which they entered.

"I'm afraid we shall have to turn off the lights," said Dixon Hawke. "You, Tommy, stay behind the chair near the switch, and don't turn it on unless I give the word. I'll stay over there behind the settee. Baxter, will you make yourself comfortable behind the filing cabinets?"

"I should not advise anyone to partake of Mrs Melville's hospitality. The food and drink may be all right, but we can't afford to take chances."

When Hawke and Baxter had taken up their positions, Tommy turned off the lights, and they settled down to wait. Midnight came and went, then one, and two.

Even Hawke was beginning to despair, when a faint squeaking noise from the direction of the desk alerted him. Then there was a light thud, apparently on the floor, the movement of stealthy footsteps, and a pencil shaft of light flickered round the room. As it came to rest on the filing cabinet, Dixon Hawke sprang from his hiding-place and shouted, "Lights, Tommy!"

When the room blazed with light the man standing near the filing cabinets shot at Hawke from his pocket, missed, and went down with a crash as Baxter leapt on him.

"Sir Francis Llangelly?" asked Hawke, when, a minute later, the man had been disarmed, and Baxter

had examined with amazement the altered position of the desk and the hole in the floor.

The prisoner sullenly nodded.

"What was it that you feared in Melville's manuscript? Some disclosures about your private life?" asked Dixon Hawke.

"You should know; you've read it. I was hard-up and I'd been cheating at cards—not only here but at my club. Melville threatened to expose me."

"So you murdered him, using your knowledge of the secret entry to the study from the wine cellar, and stole the typescript of his autobiography. When you read in the papers about the discovery of the completed manuscript you had to come back to try again. But there never was a completed manuscript."

"What!" gasped the prisoner.

"No. I knew that the person who came back to steal the manuscript would be the murderer. I suspected that there must be a secret entry beneath the desk when I saw the clean semi-circle and the spot of oil on the floor. No doubt you had to oil the mechanism from below before it would move silently."

Sir Francis sighed.

"I can see that you know nearly everything. The secret has been in the possession of my family for generations. The desk was my father's."

"You've been fiendishly clever, but there's one thing you couldn't know. I was in love with Mrs Melville. I hoped to marry her and return here to live. I always hated Melville for buying the place."



The Ghost Wore Uniform

A Forging Mystery

DIXON HAWKE turned the nose of his grey 3½-litre coupe north out of the cobbled streets of Huddersfield. Avoiding the left fork, which would take him through Slaithwaite and into Lancashire, he continued straight on up the winding road leading across Barnby Moor. The road was wet and shiny, but the drizzling rain had ceased with the coming of darkness, and a full moon gleamed brightly between gaps in the racing clouds.

A smile played about the private

detective's lips. "Do you believe in ghosts, Tommy?" he asked suddenly.

Tommy Burke, his assistant, who was sitting beside him, almost jumped out of his seat. "Do I what, Guv'nor?" he gasped. "Er—no, of course not."

Yet on a dark night like this, with the moonlight showing fitfully, the bare moors and the shrieking wind, his voice did not sound too confident.

"Well, what do you think of this?" asked Hawke, bringing the car to a halt as it topped the crest of the hill.

The Ghost Wore Uniform

The moon, emerging from the clouds, cast its beams full on an old medieval castle, which stood on a rocky crag on the opposite side of the valley.

Tommy gulped. "Fair gives you the creeps, Guv'nor. Reminds me of Dracula and vampires and all that. That's not where we're staying tonight, is it?"

"No," laughed Hawke. "We're staying at the Golden Knight, in the village of Benton, down in the valley. The castle is known as Benton Tower, and, according to local tradition, it's haunted. I've no doubt there were plenty of dark doings in it years ago. Anyway," he added as he let in the clutch, "the locals are reluctant to go there after dark. But Inspector Baxter seems to think there is some connection between the village of Benton and these forged bank notes that have been flooding the country, and he wants us to have a general look round."

"The Chief of the Flying Squad is afraid of ghosts, so he sends us up here to do the job for him, eh?" grinned Tommy.

"More likely he thinks your ugly mug will scare them off," laughed Hawke, as the car sped on down the hill and rolled into the market square of Benton.

The market square was typical of these villages set amongst the bare Pennine moors of North Yorkshire. On one side was the church. On the opposite side was the village's chief hostelry, the Golden Knight. The other sides of the square were made up by the usual brown sandstone houses, some shops, a pub or

two, and one building with a sign outside which told all and sundry that it was the police station.

Hawke pulled up outside the inn. Rooms had been reserved for them, and after a wash they came downstairs to the snug dining-room, where their meal awaited them. Before a blazing log fire, which gave a cheerful atmosphere to the room, stood a tall man in the uniform of an officer of the North Riding Constabulary.

"Allow me to introduce myself," he said, stepping forward as the Dover Street investigator and his assistant entered the room. "I am Inspector Wentworth, and you, of course, are Mr Dixon Hawke. Baxter described you perfectly."

"He's had plenty of opportunities to observe me," laughed Hawke as he took the proffered hand.

"I took the liberty of making it a threesome for supper," continued Wentworth. "I can put the facts as we know them to you while we eat, and you needn't be kept up too late."

As they ate, Wentworth told them all the police knew. By tracing back forged bank notes, Scotland Yard had located the apparent source of distribution as in the North Yorkshire area. The North Riding Constabulary had traced the most likely source to the village of Benton.

"But," said Wentworth, "everyone here seems to be above suspicion. We have searched all lonely quarries and so on in the countryside for signs of any concealed printing press. We have even searched Benton Tower, and I may

The strange story of the haunted Tower

say it was a job to get the local constables to venture into those old dungeons and dreary corridors. It may seem silly to you, a Londoner, but for these country-born folk the Tower is very definitely haunted."

At that moment the door opened and a thick-set, ruddy-complexioned man in hacking jacket and breeches came in.

"Ah! This is Mr Yeoman, proprietor of the Golden Knight," said the Inspector, introducing the newcomer to Hawke.

"Oh! So you've come about these forgeries," said the innkeeper. His voice was that of a southerner and had little trace of a Yorkshire accent.

"Well, I'll be going now," said Wentworth, the meal being over. "I'll leave you to sleep on it. Sergeant Bell will be at the station across the square in the morning, and will give you every assistance. Mr Yeoman here can give you some more local colour. Good-night."

"Good-night," replied Hawke, and a few moments later they heard the sound of a car being driven away.

Tommy Burke's Mission

"I'M something of an archæologist and historian," said Yeoman, as he, Hawke and Tommy sat round the fire, each with a tankard of ale in his hand and Hawke puffing steadily at his much-travelled pipe. "Legend has it that the Tower is haunted by the ghost of Sir Humphrey de Bon Ton, Humphrey of the Powerful Voice,

to translate the old Norman French roughly, and hence corrupted into the village name of Benton."

The innkeeper paused to light a cigarette before continuing his story. "This knight so bold, who thrived about the time of King John, apparently had the habit of throwing those he disliked into the moat that surrounds the castle. His ghost has similar habits."

He smiled deprecatingly. "I'm not asking you to believe that, but, nevertheless, two men in the last twelve months who dared to spend the night in the tower for a bet were found next morning in the moat, with their heads cracked as though they had been thrown from a height into the shallow water."

"So nobody goes there now, eh?" said Hawke.

"Not at night," rejoined their host.

"Well, I think it's time we turned in, Tommy," was the Dover Street detective's next remark.

When they had said good-night and retired to their room, Hawke carefully knocked his pipe out in an ashtray. Half to Tommy, half to himself, he said, "I'm a bit puzzled. According to what Baxter said, the police are pretty certain that these forged bank notes are printed in some secret hiding-place in Benton. The Tower is the obvious place, yet the local chaps haven't been able to find anything. There is no direct evidence connecting Yeoman with the forgeries, but he undoubtedly knows more about the old castle than anyone else, and even his knowledge of the place hasn't helped the police. On the other hand, this



Tommy Burke was a prisoner in Benton Tower, and Dixon Hawke's only way of reaching him was by scaling the stone walls of the castle.

Hawke plays follow-my-leader — on the trail of a ghost!

dubious yarn about the bold, bad baron seems like a deliberate attempt to arouse our well-known curiosity so that we go there tonight."

There was silence for a few minutes. Suddenly Hawke turned to Tommy and said, "I see no reason why we should disappoint Mr Yeoman. I think you ought to inspect Benton Tower tonight."

"What?" gulped Tommy.

"Yes," continued Hawke. "If you start now you should be there just before midnight. The road is signposted."

"What about you, Guv'nor?" asked his assistant.

"I've little doubt that Yeoman will follow us," replied the detective, "And then I shall follow Yeoman."

Five minutes later Hawke and his assistant ostentatiously left the inn, deliberately closing their door with a bang and chatting loudly. They got into the car and Tommy took the wheel. No sooner had they slowly turned the corner out of the market square and were out of sight of the inn, when Hawke jumped out and hid in the shadows, while Tommy rapidly accelerated up the hill towards the castle.

Hawke's reasoning proved correct, for hardly a minute later two shadowy figures came out of the now darkened hotel. They drove off rapidly in the same direction as Tommy. As they drove past, Hawke was able to recognise one man as Yeoman, and saw that the other was wearing a police inspector's uniform.

He hurried over to the police station. Inside at a desk sat a sergeant. He looked up as Hawke came in.

"Mr Dixon Hawke," he said. "I recognised you at first glance, but where's Inspector Wentworth?"

"That's what I'd like to know," said Hawke grimly, and rapidly related the evening's happenings.

"That's funny," said Sergeant Bell, rubbing his chin. "The inspector said he was going to meet you at the Golden Knight and bring you over here after dinner. That's what I've been waiting for."

Hawke was not very impressed by this sergeant. If he had had any initiative, he would have found out what had happened to detain the inspector so long. However, it was no use crying over spilt milk.

"Have you got a car?" Hawke asked. "I want to borrow it to go up to the castle."

"Um, yes. But I can't leave here until Constable Duckers comes on duty at midnight. In five minutes time," added the sergeant, looking up at the clock.

"I can't wait that long," snapped Hawke. "This is a matter of life and death. I'll drive myself."

Surprisingly, the sergeant, who seemed quite bewildered by the situation, made little demur to this astounding breach of procedure, and Hawke left him telephoning the headquarters of the North Riding Constabulary, at Northallerton, while he drove off up the hill towards the castle.

The rain had started again and the road was greasy, but Hawke drove as fast as the old Morris Ten would go, for he had an idea that all might not be well with Tommy.

His headlights picked out the signpost that pointed the road to

The Ghost Wore Uniform

"Benton Tower — 200 yards." Stopping the car, so that he would not betray his arrival, he sprinted down the lane as fast as he could in the dark. He stopped suddenly when he saw that the path ended abruptly at the castle moat. Someone had raised the drawbridge.

The Secret of the Tower

THE sky had cleared again, and the full moon shone brightly on the castellated walls of Benton Tower. By its eerie light Hawke could see, moored a few yards away on his side of the moat, a small dinghy. In a few seconds he had untied it and rowed across.

The castle wall towered vertically above him, and the smooth surface of the raised drawbridge was quite unclimbable. Fortunately, the old flints and stones of the walls provided numerous small hand and footholds, and he began his precarious ascent.

From time to time only Hawke's fingertips held him as his feet slipped from the tiny ledges, or as bits of the old stone crumbled and broke away to fall with a splash in the dark waters below. It was with great relief that he at last hauled himself up over the coping stones on the battlements.

Down below, in the courtyard, he could see two cars and a door, out of which shone a stream of light. Taking off his shoes, Hawke ran rapidly and silently down to the door which led into the central keep of the castle. Some winding stairs went downwards, and he could hear

the muffled sound of voices coming from below.

Descending as rapidly as the worn stone steps would allow, he found himself in a large, gloomy, dimly-lit chamber which was obviously fitted out as a museum, with suits of armour standing in various positions. Swords, maces, shields and halberds hung from the walls. In one corner, part of the stone wall had swung back on secret hinges to reveal a hidden room. From this room came the sound of voices.

Keeping to the shadow of the wall, Hawke stole noiselessly to a spot where, from behind a full suit of fifteenth century armour, he could see into the room. The sight he saw almost made him gasp with horror. In the centre of the room was a medieval rack, on which Tommy was stretched out. It was the torture chamber of the castle.

"Where's Hawke?" snarled a voice which the detective recognised as belonging to Yeoman. Tommy gritted his teeth and said nothing.

At that instant Hawke acted. He pushed the suit of armour beside him and it crashed to the floor.

"What's that?" yelled the man in the inspector's uniform as the noise echoed through the old vaults. "Someone else is here."

Yeoman had paled.

"Impossible. The drawbridge is up. It's rats."

"I'm going to see," muttered Kirke nervously, and pulled an automatic from his pocket.

Hawke had edged round to the doorway. As the thug emerged hesitantly, his gun in his hand, Hawke grabbed his wrist and clapped

The grim gun-battle in a medieval torture-chamber

a hand over his mouth. The other gave a stifled scream of terror as he was dragged into the darkness. In a second Hawke had wrested the gun from his trembling fingers and hit him hard enough on the head to put him out for the next few minutes.

Yeoman was sweating with fear as he, too, pulled a gun from a shoulder holster and came to the door.

"Where are you, Kirke?" he shouted, peering into the gloom. There was no answer.

"Afraid of ghosts?" jeered Tommy.

"I'll kill you, you interfering fool," yelled Yeoman, wheeling round and training his gun on the helpless Tommy.

A shot rang out, and the gun dropped from the murderous inn-keeper's fingers. Hawke emerged from the darkness.

"You make too good a target silhouetted in the light, Yeoman. Your little game is up. It's lucky you didn't have the opportunity to do what you intended to Tommy, or I shouldn't have fired at your hand."

Keeping Yeoman, who was nursing a shattered hand, covered, Hawke quickly released Tommy.

"Cor, you were just in time, Guv'nor. I was just beginning to feel the strain on my arms. There's their printing press." Tommy pointed to a small machine in a corner of the room which Hawke hadn't been able to see.

Kirke, in his borrowed uniform, was just coming to. He was still terrified, but seemed to be glad his captors were flesh and blood, and not ghosts.

"Where's Inspector Wentworth?" snapped Hawke.

"There," said Kirke, pointing to a little wooden door about four feet high.

Tommy dashed over and opened it. In a little, almost airless chamber—a dungeon of "little ease"—was a man bound and gagged. He was soon released, and when he had recovered he said—

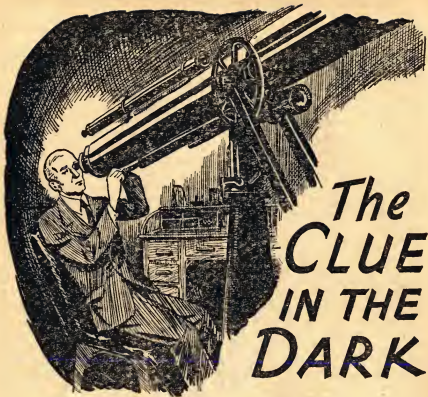
"I'm the real Inspector Wentworth, Mr Hawke. I had my suspicions of Yeoman, and that's why I asked my old friend, Baxter, if he would persuade you to come up here. Only Yeoman knew of the existence of this secret room and how to open the hidden door in the wall. He was completely free from any fear of discovery. Somehow he learned of my plans. I dared not show I was suspicious of him, and when I came over to the Golden Knight to wait for you, I was knocked unconscious. Kirke must have taken my uniform."

Hawke and Tommy lowered the drawbridge just as a police car arrived from Northallerton. The thugs were handed over and whisked away to jail.

"Well, that puts an end to that supply of forged bank notes," said Tommy as Hawke drove back to the inn. "What made you suspicious of the 'inspector'?"

Hawke yawned sleepily.

"Baxter and Wentworth worked together when they first joined the police many years ago, and were old friends, though they haven't met for years. The masquerading Kirke didn't show enough interest in Baxter for my liking. The rest just followed."



The Silent Killer

SETH SANDERSON looked up from his work as the sound of the car reached his ears. In the silence of the night he could hear it very plainly.

It distracted him for a moment from his study of the chart spread out on the observatory table in front of him.

That would be Robert, his son, coming back from his evening in town. He glanced at the clock. It was one-fifteen. Perhaps the boy had forgotten by now the bitter

words both had said only that afternoon.

Sanderson sighed and passed a thin hand vaguely across his eyes. Distressing, very distressing, these upsets were. Distracted and clouded the mind. Made it hard to attune oneself to the infinite peace of the stars, so untroubled by human emotion.

Sanderson heard the car leave the road and swing on to the gravelled drive. He heard the squeak of brakes. Robert had stopped the car and left the engine running.

Why, he wondered vaguely?

The death of a stargazer sets a problem for Hawke

Then the car drove on.

Sanderson pushed all thoughts of their quarrel to the back of his mind. The boy had not meant what he said.

Five minutes later he was lost in his studies again. He did not hear the soft footsteps steadily mounting the stairs to this circular room at the top of the observatory tower. He was not even aware—at first—that the door of the room had opened.

Not till his visitor's shadow fell across the chart did he know there was anyone there.

And by then it was too late.

* * * *

Chief Inspector Baxter, of the Flying Squad, waited at the end of the drive for the arrival of Dixon Hawke. As often at the start of a case, Baxter was looking a little disgruntled. He certainly had plenty to occupy his mind.

He opened the gate to let Hawke through, then shut it firmly again and leaned back against it.

Hawke came across to him from the car, followed by Tommy Burke, his capable young assistant.

"Take a look at the setting first," the chief inspector grunted. "Save explanations later."

Between high banks of rhododendron bushes, the drive swerved away to the house—a solid Georgian building, the home of a man with money.

A few yards inside the gate to the right stood the observatory. Its door squarely faced the house across a stretch of lawn. A short path ran obliquely from the drive to the

observatory door, cutting through the bushes.

"Come and see the corpse," the chief inspector invited. "Name's Seth Sanderson."

"I've heard of him," said Hawke. "Astronomy, I think. An amateur—but gifted. Regarded in certain circles as something of an expert."

"That's him all right," agreed Baxter. "But this morning he's very dead."

He led the way down the narrow path to the door of the observatory, where a constable stood on duty.

"A rich man's hobby," said Baxter, as they mounted the narrow stairs. "He must have had plenty of money."

They came to the room at the top of the tower, a circular, windowless room with a sectional, domed roof. It was fitted out regardless of cost. Sanderson had begrudged nothing to his passion.

Hundreds of charts were pinned to the wall with red drawing-pins. A ten-inch telescope pushed its way up to the open roof. Books were stacked all round. To one side was a leather-topped writing-desk.

Across the desk, face down on the chart he had been studying, sprawled Seth Sanderson.

He had been killed by blows on the back of the head by some heavy instrument. There was very little blood, but the back of his head was crushed in.

"Instrument's there," said Baxter, pointing to a heavy, brass-bound telescope that lay on the desk by the dead man's side. "Murderer found it all handy. Didn't trouble to take it away,

The Clue in the Dark

which means that his dabs aren't on it. But I'll have it finger-printed now you've had a look."

Dixon Hawke looked at the corpse. Seth had been struck down as he sat in his chair, and had flopped forward over the desk.

"Either didn't hear the murderer come—or wasn't surprised to see him," Hawke suggested quietly.

Baxter grunted agreement.

"But which?" he asked. "Looks harmless enough. A—a kind face, I should say. Doc's seen him, by the way. Puts the time of death between midnight and three o'clock. Round about one, most likely. I can't pin him down any closer."

It was an old grievance with the inspector.

Hawke bent down and picked up from the floor one of the red drawing-pins so extensively used. He replaced it on the desk.

"I'll give you the household," said Baxter. "Usual maids and a butler. Wife of the deceased. Maybe he could pick the stars, but you'll be surprised at his choice in women. Married only six months. Second marriage for him. There's a son by the former marriage. Boy about twenty-two. I've taken statements from them, but you'll like to hear their stories yourself?"

Hawke nodded.

"Don't think the old boy had much interest in anything at all, except astronomy," the chief inspector said. "Can't think how he came to get married. Or maybe she married him. Used to spend most of his nights down here, and slept for most of the day. Not much company for his bride."

"But plenty of money," said Hawke.

"Rolling in it," said Baxter. "It was a consolation maybe."

"And now he's gone—who inherits? The wife? Or the son?" Hawke asked.

"Wife," said Baxter briefly. "But—well! You'll hear the stories yourself. Maid took him a cup of tea at half-past seven this morning. Found his bed not slept in. Reported to the butler, who didn't seem to think that unusual at all. Apparently the old boy often worked all night—and resented interruptions. So nobody suspected there was anything wrong. About nine o'clock the son, Robert, came down to the observatory to see his father. He found him—like that."

There was a certain note in Baxter's voice that made Hawke look up.

"You're getting all set to arrest the boy?" he said inquiringly.

The chief inspector frowned.

"Might be," he acknowledged, "if I could see the motive. There's plenty—but wait till you hear yourself. Let's get along to the house."

They crossed the lawn in silence.

The Man in the Moonlight

INSIDE the house was repeated the stolid, substantial air of the observatory. They chose a small room on the left of the hall, and Baxter sent his sergeant to fetch Mrs Sanderson.

The butler came in, soft-footed, and put down a tray of drinks close to Baxter's elbow, standing quietly aside to let Mrs Sanderson enter.

The reluctant witness at the bedroom window

Hawke got quite a shock, though his face showed nothing of it. The lady was at least thirty years younger than her late husband. She was a blonde, with certain good looks, but somehow seemed out of place among the quiet furnishings of the room. There were traces of tears on her face.

"Sit down," Baxter said quietly. "This is Mr Hawke, and Mr Burke. We don't want to worry you more than we must. We know what a shock you've had. But I'd like you to tell Mr Hawke, if you will, just what you told me."

"About—about what I saw last night?" she asked.

Inspector Baxter nodded.

"But first," Dixon Hawke put in. "I understand your marriage was quite a recent event."

"We—we had been married six months," she told them.

"Tell me," said Dixon Hawke. "You were on — er — affectionate terms with your husband?"

"But of course," she said, wide-eyed. "You see—well, you see, I loved him."

"Yes!" said Hawke gently. "Yes! Now can I have your statement?"

She looked from him to Baxter almost pleadingly.

"I don't like——" she began.

"I understand," said Baxter. "Naturally you are averse to incriminate anyone. But may I point out again, strongly, that the truth can do no harm to an innocent person."

"No!" she said. "I see." And she turned back to Dixon Hawke.

"We dined alone last night, my

husband and I," she said. "My—my stepson had gone up to town in the car. About nine o'clock my husband went to the observatory. He was always going there."

"And what did you do?" asked Hawke.

"Read a little," she answered. "Listened to the wireless. Then went to bed at—oh!—about eleven o'clock, I fancy."

She paused to dab her eyes. They were really beautiful eyes, Tommy Burke was thinking. It was distressing to see her cry.

"I dozed, and woke, and dozed again," she went on plaintively. "I—I never sleep very well when my husband is working through the night. I got restless, so slipped out of bed, intending to get a cigarette. I walked across to the window. From there, you understand, I can see across to the observatory. It was—oh!—a beautiful night, nearly as bright as day."

"Full moon," said Baxter stolidly.

"Yes," the lady said. "I glanced down at my watch. It—it was a quarter-past one. Then I looked across the lawn. I saw the door of the observatory open. Somebody came out, stood with his back to the door, leaning against it, I fancy, for a moment or two, then moved quickly down the path through the bushes to the drive."

"And—you recognised the person?" Dixon Hawke asked quietly.

"Yes! Oh, yes!" she said. She seemed a little breathless. Tears were not far away. "You see—the moon was full."

The Clue in the Dark

Hawke looked at her for a minute before saying anything. His face, Tommy saw, looked thoughtful.

"Of course! The moon was full," he agreed. "I will keep that fact in mind. Who was it that you saw?"

Mrs Sanderson looked pleadingly at Baxter.

"Must I, Inspector?" she asked.

Baxter only nodded.

"It—it was Robert, my stepson," she said at last. "It didn't mean anything to me. I thought, 'Robert's home from town. He's been to see his father.' And I just can't think even now that Robert could injure his father. They—they quarrelled, of course, now and then. But I'm sure that meant really nothing. I can't think——"

She broke off, and there was no doubt at all about the tears in her eyes.

Hawke got to his feet.

"Perhaps you'd show me your window," he said.

She led them obediently up the wide, impressive staircase to a large room on the first floor.

Hawke crossed at once to the window. He stood for quite a while gazing out across the lawn to the observatory.

"For the moment," he said, without turning, "I think that will be all, Mrs Sanderson."

She went quietly down the stairs. "Well! That seems definite enough," Baxter said doggedly.

"And the stepson—what does he say?" Dixon Hawke inquired.

"He—better hear him yourself," Baxter said. "Shall we go downstairs?"

Hawke seemed a bit absent-minded.

"Yes! Oh, yes!" he replied. "But—I'd like just to take another look at the observatory."

Baxter shrugged, and led the way downstairs again. He was used to Hawke's strange notions.

The butler moved to open the door—a silent, thin-faced fellow—and Hawke slipped quickly outside, while Baxter and Tommy stayed behind.

In the circular room at the top of the tower, Hawke spent a minute or two studying some of the many charts.

"I thought so," he muttered before he left. "Now, why on earth did she say it?"

Hawke's Strange Request

THE thoughtful frown was still on his face when he entered the house again. Baxter probably would be getting quite impatient. He'd fetch Robert Sanderson along himself—and save that bit of time. Give Baxter no time, either, to ask his curious questions before things were a little more plain.

Hawke opened a door on the right.

There was nobody in the room but the butler, Martin. He was kneeling on the hearthrug building up the fire, and he had not heard Dixon Hawke enter.

The Dover Street detective seemed to find much of interest in the view that he could see—the kneeling man in front of the fire, his coat removed for the job, the soles of his shoes exposed to sight, his hair a little untidy.

Why did Hawke visit the scene of the crime again?

Hawke coughed.

John Martin looked round with a start, and rose hastily to his feet.

"Oh, carry on," Dixon Hawke urged. "No need for me to interrupt you. Just one or two questions I want to ask. When the maid reported your master's bed unslept in, you didn't think that unusual?"

"No, sir," the butler answered. "He often worked all night. I thought nothing of the matter."

"I understand," Hawke nodded. "It didn't enter your head to go to the observatory yourself, then?"

Martin shook his head.

"Oh, no, sir," he said at once. "I never go to the observatory. None of the servants do. The master was always afraid they might interfere with his work. Had I suspected anything wrong, I should have reported to the mistress."

"Quite," agreed Dixon Hawke. "Have you been in the household long?"

"Er—not long, sir. Nearly six months. I was engaged, I believe, just after my master's wedding."

"I see," said Hawke. "Can you tell me where I can find Mr Robert?"

"In the lounge next door, sir, I think," was the reply.

A couple of minutes later Hawke was back again in the small room, with the inspector, having fetched Robert along.

Robert Sanderson scarcely looked his twenty-two years. There was something boyish about him. But he was big and strong, and once or twice Hawke caught Baxter looking at the youngster's hands.

His tale was quite straightforward.

He had gone up to town before

dinner on the previous evening. He had done a show with some friends—he supplied their names and addresses—and afterwards gone to supper.

"And you got back just about one-fifteen—round about the time your father met his death," Baxter said unemotionally.

"I—yes," the youngster admitted. "I put the car straight away, and went upstairs to bed."

"And you didn't call on your father on your way up?" asked Baxter.

"I did not," Robert replied.

"Yet the tyre marks on the gravel show that you stopped the car just where the small path comes out on to the main drive."

Baxter's tone was still flat.

The youngster looked surprised.

"But, of course," he said, "I got out of the car to close the entrance gate. I always do when I'm late."

Baxter grunted, and took from his pocket a folded piece of paper.

"I've just had brought to me," he said, "the result of the fingerprinting of the telescope used as a weapon on your father."

Nobody spoke for a moment.

What's coming now? wondered Hawke.

"The prints on it are somewhat blurred," Baxter continued. "Some, without any doubt, are those of your father. Some—just as certainly—are yours."

And now Baxter's steady eyes were boring into the youngster's and his face was hard and grim.

For a moment Robert was non-plussed.

"But—oh, yes," he said at last.

The Clue in the Dark

"I was in there yesterday afternoon talking to my father. The telescope was lying on the desk. I may have handled it."

He seemed embarrassed.

"Look," he added. "We quarrelled. I'll have to tell you about it."

Baxter did not speak.

"We've quarrelled a lot," the youngster said very bitterly, "ever since my father married again. We had very different opinions of my stepmother, as a matter of fact. My fault, I daresay, but there you are."

"I see," said the chief inspector.

"But you don't," the youngster said, flushing. "I was terribly fond of my father. If you think——"

"I collect facts," the inspector said grimly.

He turned to Dixon Hawke.

"Anything you want to know?" he asked.

"Well, yes," said Hawke. "The butler. He's a recent addition, I hear. Did your father engage him?"

Young Robert looked uncertain.

"I shouldn't think so," he said.

"He was vague on domestic details. Probably my stepmother saw to the engaging of Martin."

"I see," nodded Hawke, taking no heed of Baxter's curious stare. "By the way, Mr Sanderson, if you could bring me half a dozen drawing-pins some time I'd be very obliged."

"I'll—I'll see Martin about it," said Robert. "As a matter of fact, so far as I know, there isn't a drawing-pin in the house. The only likely place to get them will be the observatory."

"Well, it doesn't matter," smiled Hawke. "I'll have to manage without them."

They sent young Robert away.

"Well," said Baxter. "There you are. There's a lot of routine work to be done. We'll check the youngster's movements last night, and take a good look at the car. In the meantime, you and Tommy——"

"That suits me," Hawke chipped in. "I've some jobs to do in town. I'll drop in again tomorrow—just in time, I hope, to prevent you making any mistakes."

* * * *

It was noon the next day when Hawke got back.

"I'd like to do my talking with everybody present," he said to Inspector Baxter. "And I've got plenty to say."

Baxter had young Robert Sanderson and Mrs Sanderson summoned to the room.

"And the butler," Hawke demanded.

A little surprised, the inspector complied.

"I went to the Yard last night," said Hawke, when they were all together. "To the finger-print department. They kindly developed some prints for me there, and consulted their records. They were really exceptionally helpful. They traced one set of the prints I had—and showed me a photograph of the man to whom they belonged. The photo showed two figures—that was lucky for me—the man and his wife!"

John Martin moved very quickly. He spun round and made for the door. Tommy tripped him up and fell on top of him. The sergeant joined in the struggle, and in a

The killer carried a vital clue—on the soles of his shoes!

moment or so Baxter had snapped the bracelets round the cursing man's wrists.

"Better do the same for Mrs—er—Sanderson," Hawke said very quietly. "If she feels like acting the same way."

But the woman sat white-faced and rigid.

"Seth Sanderson's death," said Hawke, "was an elaborate conspiracy between these two, John Arkwright—that's his proper name—and his legal wife, Nellie."

"So she was never my father's wife?" Robert Sanderson gasped.

"No," said Hawke, "so any will in favour of his wife will be invalid. Where they spotted him, I don't know, but the plot was born right then. A bogus marriage, an early death—and on your father's money the two would be in clover."

"Is—is this true?" the youngster demanded, looking at the woman.

She sat, white-faced, but silent.

"True enough," said Hawke gently. "They did their best to throw suspicion on you, of course. They probably knew of your quarrel in the afternoon. They knew you had gone to town. It's my guess the murderer waited, hidden in the bushes, till you came home in the car, then went up and murdered your father so that the time of his death should approximate to the time of your arrival. It was ridiculously easy."

Tommy Burke looked puzzled.

"But what made you smell a rat?" he inquired.

"They overdid it," said Hawke. "False witnesses often do. They tell unnecessary lies."

"But——" said Tommy Burke, and stopped.

"I knew she hadn't recognised young Robert coming out of the observatory door, and walking along that short path," Hawke said positively. "I checked it up, of course."

"But——" said a puzzled Tommy again.

"At one-fifteen yesterday morning," Dixon Hawke explained, "the moon was in such a position that the observatory door was in shadow, and the shadow of the tower lay right along that path. It is possible, but unlikely, she might have spotted someone coming out. It's quite impossible that, from this distance, she should have recognised him while he walked in the shadow."

"Good grief!" gasped Tommy. "Of course! But that didn't provide a link."

"No, it didn't," said Dixon Hawke. "I knew that the lady had lied, very deliberately. Why, I did not know. Chance forged the link that told me."

Tommy lifted his eyebrows.

"The red drawing-pins Sanderson used to fix his charts to the wall were quite distinctive," said Hawke. "I happened to spot one embedded in the sole of the butler's shoe. There were none of them in the house, so when John Arkwright declared he had not been into the tower, well, that was another lie. Scotland Yard did the rest."

"I'm glad," said Baxter briefly, as he turned to the handcuffed man, "that there's something for which my department can claim a little credit."

K.O. Candy!



A Rotten Racket

"IN my opinion, the worst type of criminal is the filthy crook who peddles dope," said Dixon Hawke, as he stared down at the pitiful figure of the young girl lying lifeless before him.

His companion, Detective-Inspector Baxter, chief of the Flying Squad, nodded.

"My sentiments exactly," he agreed. "This kid's lucky—she's through with it all. According to

the doctor, she was in an advanced stage of addiction, and if she'd gone on living she'd have taken more and more of the stuff until she ended up a raving lunatic."

"Cannabis indica, wasn't it—commonly known as 'hashish'?" queried the famous private detective.

"That wasn't what killed her," replied the inspector. "She took too stiff a shot of cocaine, and it put

Too much dope spelled death for a dance hostess

her out for keeps. But hashish was her usual dope, and apparently she was pretty full of it. Wonder why she took it?"

Hawke shrugged.

"I should say in order to counteract the tiredness and lassitude caused by her job—dance hostess in some night club or other, didn't you say?"

"Yes, in the Silver Slipper in Frinton Street—somewhere in the Soho district. Gloria Harman her name was. Pretty little thing, too."

"Perhaps that's where she got the stuff," hazarded Tommy Burke, who was lurking in the background.

Baxter glanced across at Dixon Hawke's young assistant.

"I'm checking up on the place right away, of course. But I'm not hoping for much from that quarter. It's too obvious a trail, and the boys who handle the dope racket are the most cunning crowd in crookdom."

"Well, there are certainly no indications here as to how or where she got it," stated the private detective. "We've gone over every inch of this room and learned nothing."

"Except," put in Tommy, with a faint grin, "that she was one of Humphrey Bogart's fans—she must have a couple of dozen different photos of him over there—and that she was fond of sweets."

"You mean those sticky papers?" asked Baxter.

"Yes, there were quite a number knocking about."

"This dope business is on the increase again," declared the inspector. "Things have been quiet in that direction for the last twelve

months or so, but there's been a new outbreak. This is only one of a number of different cases we've got filed at the Yard."

"Anyway, it won't hurt to run the rule over the people she knew," suggested Hawke.

"The worst of it is," retorted Baxter savagely, "that, even if we find the bloke responsible, we can't charge him with murder. This kid took the stuff of her own free will, so 'death from misadventure' will be the coroner's verdict."

Dixon Hawke sighed as he turned away.

This case was typical of others which had come within his experience. A girl, young and attractive, occupying a bed-sitting-room in Camden Town, and most likely with respectable, hard-working parents somewhere in the provinces. Living a rather hectic night life, frequently tired out and over-strained by the excitement of her job. A chance remark in a moment of depression, and the dope peddler saw his opportunity.

The first shot or two taken "for fun," or to relieve the strain, then the craving developed until the drug became indispensable. From that moment the victim was in the toils, for a supply of dope had to be forthcoming regularly, at any cost, otherwise insanity or suicide would result.

The price extorted was usually as high as the victim could be induced to pay. There was no option but to co-operate in keeping secret the source of supply lest it be cut off, with disastrous results.

"Murder," said Dixon Hawke to his assistant as they left the house

together, "is clean and sweet by comparison. Let's go back to Dover Street, Tommy, and see if we can puzzle out a new angle on this rotten game."

A Queer Theft

CAMDEN TOWN is a district of mixed thoroughfares. It has its squalid areas, particularly round and about the Caledonian Road, but it tries to compensate for these by the more respectable atmosphere of the region that stretches out towards Tufnell Park.

Gloria Harman had lived in St George's Avenue, one of the better-class streets, and, leaving the house, Dixon Hawke and Tommy Burke climbed into their car. While Tommy was driving down one of the dingier streets, he suddenly uttered a snort of indignation, and pointed at something across the road.

"Well, of all the blinking nerve!" he growled. "Just look at that."

The detective followed the direction of his assistant's finger, and saw what was happening. A small child of about two or three years old had stooped to pick up a stick of candy which lay on the pavement. As she did so, a man strode up to her, pushed her roughly aside, seized the coveted find, and made off with it, leaving the child howling with disappointment!

The whole incident had not occupied longer than ten or twelve seconds, and Tommy Burke, one hand on the wheel, was registering righteous indignation.

"Talk about a dirty trick!" he gasped. "Poor little blighter!"

But Dixon Hawke had stiffened, and a gleam flickered in his keen, grey eyes.

"Quick, Tommy," he said urgently, "tail that man! Don't lose him, whatever you do, and report to me at Dover Street as soon as you can."

Tommy Burke stared.

"What the——"

The thief was already some distance along the street, his action scarcely noticed by the people hurrying to and fro.

"Get a move on!" snapped Hawke. "It's important."

The youth was out of the car in a jiffy, and was soon hot on the trail, though still at a loss to account for this swift decision on the part of his Guv'nor.

The man in front was a heavily-built fellow, well dressed and hatless, though he had on a light coat. Once out of the street, and turning left into Dalmeny Road, he slowed down his pace a little, as if conscious that any attention his unusual action might have attracted could now be safely discounted.

At the end of Dalmeny Road, he boarded a bus going along Parkhurst Road in the direction of the Seven Sisters. He clambered on top, but Tommy Burke, who also went aboard, found a seat downstairs near the door, ready to pop off as soon as his quarry, whom he had already mentally dubbed "Mr X," did.

At Seven Sisters, Mr X alighted, and Tommy followed with alacrity, though taking care to walk a few yards in the opposite direction from his quarry, so as not to rouse sus-

The bullying crook who stole candy from a kid!

picion. Then, swinging round on his heel he crossed the road, and took up the trail again. It looked like money for jam, since Mr X evidently did not have the slightest inkling that he was being followed.

Seven Sisters consists of a veritable maze of intersecting streets, and it was in one of these, before a dilapidated house which was not in keeping with his personal appearance, that Mr X went to earth. Tommy Burke, from a discreet point of vantage, watched him insert a key in the lock, open the front door, and disappear within.

"So what?" thought Tommy, scratching his head. He had carried out his orders, and now, he supposed his next job was to hand in a report to the Guv'nor at Dover Street, giving this bloke's address, and leave it to Dixon Hawke.

On the other hand, some extra information might be more useful. For instance, by knocking at the door and trumping up some yarn, he might find out the chap's name. It would be worth trying, anyhow.

Tommy crossed the road, gave a couple of raps with the knocker on the door of the house, and waited. In a few moments the door was opened by a woman—youngish, and good-looking in a flashy sort of way, with synthetic blonde hair and an overdose of lipstick.

Tommy flashed her a smile.

"Sorry to trouble you," he said, "but does Mr Steadman live here—Mr George Steadman?"

The girl eyed him coolly, and nodded her head.

"Sure, sonny. You wanna see him?"

Tommy was utterly taken aback, and could scarcely repress a gasp of amazement. So far as he was concerned, Mr George Steadman existed solely in his own imagination!

"Y-yes," he replied, "if he isn't too busy."

"Step inside," the girl moved to let Tommy pass into the hall. "I'm sure he won't be too busy to see you."

She led the way to a room on the right, and opened the door.

"Perhaps you'll wait in here. What name shall I give him?"

Tommy hesitated, then another voice spoke almost at his elbow—a quiet voice, with a sinister inflection all the more menacing because it was accompanied by the jabbing of something hard and familiarly unyielding into the young detective's ribs.

"We shan't require any name," said the voice. "In fact, we know it already. Mr Burke, isn't it—right-hand man to Dixon Hawke, the nosey 'tec?"

The speaker came round and faced Tommy, holding in one hand a revolver pointing unerringly in the direction of that disconcerted young man's third waistcoat button. He was not the same man whom Dixon Hawke's assistant had tailed from Camden Town—this one was taller and more sparsely built.

"Say, what the blazes——!" began Tommy blusteringly.

"Hold it, son!" interrupted the gunman. "I saw you the other day giving evidence at the Old Bailey. And I recognised you at once when I was looking out of the window just now, and spotted you quite

obviously shadowing—er—Mr George Steadman, who came in a moment ago.

"Now"—the revolver jerked forward half an inch—"up with your hands, and no funny stuff or they'll be able to put what's left of you on ice!"

Help From the Landlady

IT had been a quarter of an hour before noon when Dixon Hawke parted from his assistant in Camden Town. The detective had fully expected Tommy Burke to show up at Dover Street within the next couple of hours or, if his assignment had taken him very far afield, to have telephoned.

The whole day had passed, however, and Hawke, having received no news, was naturally beginning to feel anxious.

He had sent his assistant off largely as the result of a hunch. It had seemed to him so unusual that a fully-grown, respectably-attired man should deliberately steal a stick of candy from a small child. There must surely have been a very special reason for the act. Moreover, Dixon Hawke had noticed something which had probably escaped Tommy's observation—the expression on the man's face as he seized the sweetmeat, fleeting but unmistakable, had been one of deadly fear, as though his very life depended upon getting hold of that piece of candy.

Then, because one's mind usually works in a groove, and it is so easy to form an association of ideas, Hawke had remembered those

pieces of sticky paper found in Gloria Harman's room—pieces of paper which tasted sweet and which had undoubtedly formed part of some sort of wrapping for confectionery.

Tommy Burke had therefore been hustled off to check up on the candy stealer's movements. Now, after eight hours, the youth had not returned, nor had there been any word from him. The conviction was becoming stronger in Hawke's mind that, not for the first time, he had had a successful hunch.

Dixon Hawke looked at his watch, and saw that the time was ten minutes to eight. At the moment an idea struck him. Leaving his consulting-room he went round to the garage where he kept his car, took it out, and drove back to Camden Town. There he went straight to St George's Avenue, to the house where Gloria Harman had lived, and had a few words with Mrs Hingston, the landlady.

"I'm sorry to bother you again," said the detective, "for I'm sure you've had enough trouble already, but I want to identify someone I think may be concerned in the unfortunate death of Miss Harman, and you may be able to help me."

"I will if I can, sir," nodded Mrs Hingston.

The detective then described as much as he could recall of the appearance of the candy stealer, and he built up a fair word picture for the benefit of the landlady.

Almost before he had finished she burst out—

"Oh, yes, I remember the gentleman, but he only came here once or

Tommy is trapped — Can Hawke reach him in time?

twice, sir. That was a long time ago, and he hasn't been since."

"What was his name, Mrs Hingston?" inquired Hawke eagerly.

The woman pondered a moment.

"Ellis," she replied slowly. "No—Hillis, that's it—Mr Hillis, she called him. Quite a pleasant-spoken gentleman he was, too. You don't think he——"

Hawke cut across her question with another of his own.

"And his address—I suppose you wouldn't know that?"

"No," the landlady replied, "but I think he had something to do with the place where she worked, or she met him there or something—I'm not quite sure, sir."

"You mean the Silver Slipper Night Club?"

"Yes, that's right. But he didn't work there, though. He was a traveller for a confectionery firm—Whitehouse was its name."

The beat of the detective's pulse quickened. Confectionery again! Was he really on to something? Those sweet papers in the dead girl's room—the mysterious Mr Hillis who had known her, and had been so deadly anxious to get hold of that bar of candy—Hillis, having some connection with both the night club and a confectionery manufacturer.

Mrs Hingston being unable to give him any further information, he thanked her and took his leave, walking back to his car with a thoughtful frown.

Whitehouse—Whitehouse.

Where the dickens had he met that name before?

Then, in a flash—got it, by Jove!
"WHITEHOUSE, MANUFACTU-

RING CONFECTIONER." There had been a shop with that legend above it not a stone's throw from the spot where the detective and his assistant had witnessed the strange incident of the stolen candy bar.

The detective headed at high speed for New Scotland Yard. The duty constable in the vestibule greeted him with a smart salute, and nodded when Hawke inquired for Inspector Baxter.

"Yes, sir," said the man, "I'm almost certain the inspector's in his office. You'd better go right up."

Scotland Yard and its personnel know no hours, and though it was nearly 10 p.m. Baxter was still busily at work. He was more than ready, however, to listen to the whole of Dixon Hawke's story.

"Well, Hawke," he said when the private detective finished, "let's get this straight. You think Gloria Harman got her dope by means of prepared confectionery—that the idea? And that this chap, Hillis, put her on to it?"

"It's feasible, isn't it?" queried Hawke.

"Yes," agreed Baxter, "I suppose it is. And you believe that the candy bar that youngster picked up was a doped one which Hillis had dropped, after getting it from the nearby shop? It may sound a trifle dubious. On the other hand, I know enough of the dope racket to realise that anything's possible. Whitehouse isn't a big concern—only three or four branches, and all in the London area. They've always seemed okay, but——"

"Some of the most respectable establishments have been known to

be associated with law-breaking," was Hawke's rejoinder. "And, come to that, they may be being made use of in some way without their knowledge. But I've got a strong hunch we're on the right lines."

"So what?" The inspector twirled a pencil between his fingers. "If we could raid that Whitehouse shop we might discover a lead. But we can't do that without a warrant, and we haven't a shred of evidence convincing enough to justify my applying for one."

Dixon Hawke looked Baxter straight in the eye, and said slowly:

"Of course, a door or a window might have been—er—left open, in which case the police have authority to enter and make sure everything's in order. Now, I shall be passing the place at about half-past eleven, and if you and two or three of your men did happen to be around at that time——"

Baxter chuckled grimly.

"Once more the old wangle, eh? If I'm on the mat for defying regulations——"

"To blazes with regulations," snapped Hawke, "when it comes to cleaning up dope!"

Torture For Tommy

TOMMY BURKE was cursing himself for a blithering idiot. He had acted from the best of motives, but he had acted too impulsively. In trying to bluff a spot of useful information out of the occupants of that house he had landed himself into a proper hornets' nest.

Unable to show resistance at the

wrong end of a gun, he had been securely tied, and taken down into a dark cellar, where he had remained throughout the remainder of the day. Then about an hour or so ago, just as darkness began to close in, two of the crowd had come down—the man he had trailed, and whose name was apparently Hillis, and another fellow called "Smarty." Hillis held a gun and gave Tommy a wicked grin.

"Come on, son, you're going for a ride," he said. "And, if you're a wise guy, you'll make no fuss."

Tommy had no option but to do as he was told. With the gun sticking in his ribs, he was compelled to leave the house and enter a waiting car. A short drive followed, and when they alighted the young man was able to identify a spot in Camden Town quite near the place where he had first picked up Hillis's trail.

They entered the side door of a confectioner's shop, and made their way to a smallish, stone-built room at the back of the premises. Tommy could not help wondering why they had not blindfolded him, since they would have known that if he managed to escape, he would have useful information for the police. Then it dawned on him that it was not intended that he should escape, and this sinister thought sent shivers down his spine.

He was once more bound, and this time gagged, and left to himself again for about half an hour. When his captors returned they brought with them a third man whom they addressed as "chief"—a short, rather stout individual with quite a benevolent expression on his face, until you looked into his eyes, and

"Tell me how much Hawke knows, or else —"

then you shuddered. Tommy's gag was removed, and the "chief" spoke—

"Well, my young friend, so you're Dixon Hawke's assistant, are you? I should be interested to know just how that infernal detective comes to be mixed up in my affairs. I had no idea I'd made any mistakes. But you are going to tell me just how much Hawke knows, or else——"

He shrugged significantly.

"You're wasting your time," snapped Tommy.

The gang leader's eyes glittered, and his lips tightened. Hillis butted in with—

"Don't argue with him, chief—give him the works straight away and show him we mean business!"

"Very well," was the chief's reply. "If he intends to be obstinate, there's no other way."

The next five minutes were bad ones for Tommy Burke. His hair was thoroughly saturated with petrol then Hillis stood over him, a box of matches in his hand.

"I'm giving you exactly two minutes to make up your mind," said the gang boss curtly. "Either you—er—wise us up, I believe is the term—to all Dixon Hawke and the police know, or you'll be starring in that great drama, 'The Human Torch.' So start thinking, lad."

Tommy was feeling pretty bad, though he did not show it, but he knew perfectly well these crooks meant all they said, and, what was more, even if he spoke he would never be allowed to leave here alive. Of course, there was nothing he could tell them, but they were not likely to believe that.

"Well?" demanded the gang boss.

"Half a minute to go, and it's your last chance."

Hillis opened the match-box and took out a match, poising it ready to strike. Tommy Burke gritted his teeth, and all at once he became aware that cold sweat was trickling down his face.

"Go to blazes!" he said thickly.

The chief nodded at Hillis, and the match scraped into flame. Just at that moment a voice snapped—

"Don't move, any one of you!"

All three crooks swung round, to find that the door had opened silently, and framed on the threshold was Dixon Hawke. Behind him were Inspector Baxter and a couple of uniformed constables. The official police were unarmed, since it would have required a special permit to carry a gun. But Dixon Hawke made up for this deficiency, and his own revolver was levelled with steady accuracy.

None of the crooks had any chance to escape. When Hawke went to release Tommy Burke, he found that the youth had fainted "just like a girl," as Tommy himself put it indignantly when he came round again.

Later investigations proved that Dixon Hawke's analysis had been correct. Whitehouse, the manufacturing confectioner, had gone into the dope racket, and small capsules were contained inside a special sort of coloured candy bar, quantities of which were found on the premises, together with a list of names and addresses of agents who passed the drugs on to the addicts.

DEATH by Time-Table



Death Watch

AMOS GRANT turned into the lane which ran by the side of the factory. At the further end his way was blocked by a high fence of railway sleepers. Just before this end was a small side door to the factory. Amos took out a key and inserted it into the lock just as the Town Hall clock struck eight.

He was always dead on time. He believed, in an old-fashioned way, that if he was paid to start at eight, then eight was the time to be there.

He closed the door behind him,

saw that it was relocked, then picked his way through the big packing-room by the light of a pocket torch.

On the further side of the lofty room was a small glass-enclosed office used by the invoicing clerk. Amos made it his headquarters for the hours he spent night-watching. There was even a folded camp-bed there for his use if he so desired.

He lit the gas under the kettle. When the water boiled he would have a cup of tea.

Suited him down to the ground,

The unarmed night-watchman who tackled a safe-breaker

this job did. With only the old-age pension, and Mary, his wife, the way she was, practically blind and bed-ridden, he needed the extra money. Besides, with this type of job he was home during daylight hours, when his daughter was out working at the laundry down the road. She was in again before he left, so between them they managed never to leave the old lady alone in the house.

It was noisy all night, of course, with the back wall of the factory actually overlooking the station and big shunting yards. Especially sometimes during the night when the heavily-laden goods trains clanked across the points, rattled through the station, and crashed into the shunting yard buffers, to have the separate waggons uncoupled and shunted all over the place.

His predecessor had turned in the job just on account of the noise. Amos did not worry, however. He was a good deal more deaf than he ever allowed, even to himself.

Good folk to work for, too. Take this bonus business. Done a good year's trading, they had, so everyone holding a job was getting a share in the luck. There would be extra money in every pay envelope the next day—even in his. He would be able to buy his Mary some little extra or other over the week-end. The money was already parcelled out and locked securely away in the safe in the boss's office.

Old Amos whistled tunelessly as the kettle boiled, and the 8.17 goods train clattered in to crash against the buffers with a row fit to raise the roof.

He made his rounds of the building just before ten o'clock. He looked

out of a back wall window to watch the 9.56 express go thundering through the station. Fascinated him—same as it had done when he was a kid.

He went round soon after eleven, and again at half-past twelve.

He ate the food he had brought with him, cleared everything away—crumbs encouraged the mice—then climbed the stairs again, clicking on the lights as he went, though he still carried his torch in his hand, just about 1.45. He knew the time without looking. He could hear the hiss of steam as the 1.51 heavy goods waited on the siding for the north-bound express to run through before jolting into the yard.

Amos did not hurry up the stairs, but took his time about climbing them.

He turned into the third-floor corridor, and realised there was a light showing under the door of the boss's office. Amos was sixty-eight, but he did not hesitate. His rubber shoes made no sound at all as he marched straight to the door.

As he flung open the door an echoing crash heralded the arrival of the train in the shunting yard—a crash so loud that it almost drowned the sound of another explosion which took place inside the room.

A man whipped round as the door was flung wide. He was standing beside the safe. His eyes went suddenly savage as he looked at the white-haired old man. Then he leapt—and Amos Grant went down under a brutal attack.

* * * * *

"Didn't give him a chance," said Baxter, scowling angrily. "Just an

ordinary, decent guy—and he had to run into this!”

There were times when the Detective Inspector found his job as a policeman a distinctly harrowing one. This was one of those times.

Dixon Hawke, the private detective at whose flat the Inspector had been breakfasting when Scotland Yard contacted him, nodded terse agreement.

“That torch,” said Tommy Burke, Dixon Hawke’s young assistant. “The glass and bulb are smashed. Maybe he got in one blow before being overcome. If so, I hope it was a good one.”

“Shouldn’t imagine so,” Dixon Hawke declared. “There’s no blood on the pieces of glass—or on the torch itself, though there’s quite a bit around. No! I’d say the old man was holding it in his hand when the attack was made, and unconsciously flung it away as he lifted his arm to shield his head.”

“We’ll have all the bits checked,” grunted Baxter. “But I don’t think they tell us much.”

They skirted the chalk-outlined space on the floor, and crossed over to the safe.

“A neat job,” Baxter admitted.

“An inside one?” Tommy suggested. “After all, everyone on the staff knew that the money was there, and could bank on the noise from the shunting yard covering up the sound of the explosion.”

Dixon Hawke shook his head.

“The chairman announced the bonus at the annual general meeting. It was reported in the Press, so I’d say plenty of folk outside the immediate staff knew that the money

was there for distribution today. There might have been a tip-off—but the job wasn’t done from inside.”

Inspector Baxter nodded reluctant agreement.

“It was blown—not broken,” he amplified. “Blowing a safe, as you know, is a highly technical job. And the guy who did this knew it down to the ground. I’d say there aren’t more than five or six crooks who could have done that job.”

“Then the ‘modus operandi’——” Dixon Hawke began.

Baxter nodded glumly.

“About our only chance,” he said. “You can bet there’ll be no prints left around.”

Detection is very often a process of elimination. It is a fact that criminals often almost sign their crimes, sometimes by unconscious habit, sometimes by nervous reaction, and sometimes deliberately out of sheer overwhelming vanity.

That is to say, one man will always, if fruit is lying around, peel and eat an apple before starting on a job. Another will always scrawl on the walls or the surface of a mirror lurid or obscene words, often with a lipstick. Still another will always do a great deal of senseless damage, apart from the job in hand.

These tendencies are noted and faithfully recorded in “modus operandi.” When a skilled job is done—as in the blowing of this safe—consultations with the records will possibly reveal half a dozen known crooks who might have done the job.

They are pulled in and questioned closely. It becomes a question then of cracking an alibi. That, as all three of the detectives knew, is often



The man at the safe looked round angrily as the night-watchman opened the office door and shone his torch inside.

Death by Time-Table

an unsatisfactory job, which often leaves the police certain in their own minds as to who is the criminal, but completely unable to prove it.

Baxter pointed now to the derisory remarks scrawled in white chalk on the inside of the rifled safe.

"Might be Hippy Longstreet," he said. "But Hippy's doing a stretch, so that lets him out okay. Might be Fingers Farrell. Or it might be Soupy Soames. Or the 'Colonel'—or Flash Frank. And every one of the little dears will have an unassailable alibi."

He shrugged his shoulders helplessly.

"I'd better get back to the Yard at once," he decided restlessly. "The sooner I pull those guys in for questioning, the shorter time they'll have to cook up their alibis. I was wondering if, maybe——"

"Yes?" asked Dixon Hawke.

"If Tommy could drive me back to town, and I could leave you and the sergeant here to collect the routine reports?"

"That suits me," nodded Hawke. "I'll give you a ring at the Yard just as soon as I get back. And don't lose hope just yet. Maybe something will come along to put us on the trail."

He watched Baxter drive away, his own face a little grim. His final words had been more hopeful than his thoughts.

He went round to the local station with Inspector Baxter's sergeant, a dour but experienced man. The local Superintendent had just returned, they found, from a visit to Amos Grant's wife. He still was looking very upset.

"She can't take it in — not properly—yet," he told them hopelessly. "Pitiful, if you know what I mean. There won't be much for you two just yet. You've seen the doctor's report?"

"The finger-print boys are busy now—but I wouldn't bank much on that. How about getting a spot of lunch—there's a decent place round the corner—and coming back later on?"

They fell in with the suggestion.

Airtight Alibis

THE Super's face was glum when he greeted Dixon Hawke and the sergeant as they came in again.

"No unusual finger-prints at all on the safe or anywhere else," he reported despondently. "As for the torch—there's no blood on that, so I suppose the murderer got away without even as much as a scratch. No blood on the bits of glass, either. A couple of small bits are missing—possibly ground into the carpet—but they don't tell us anything either."

"Then it looks as if I might as well get back to town," said Hawke. "Baxter took the car, so I'd better look out the trains."

The Super pushed a Bradshaw across.

"Page 247," he said. "It's a fairly good service to town. You won't have long to wait."

Hawke began his search for a train. A constable entered the room.

"That car, sir," he announced. "The finger-print boys have been over it now. No dabs that are any help. The owner's pestering us to get his car back again."

The one vital clue which the police never noticed!

"Well!" the Super said. "I suppose he'll have to have it. Doesn't seem any reason——"

He looked across at Hawke.

"Somebody lifted a car," he explained, "from Market Street last night. Possibly, of course, one of the local boys taking his girl for a ride. The owner notified us. We picked it up this morning just before seven o'clock in a lane just outside Allerton. That's a dozen miles down the line. I did wonder——"

"Of course," nodded Hawke. "The man who blew that safe would need to make a getaway. Have you checked on the morning trains to town from this Allerton Station?"

"Yes!" The Super nodded. "Busy place, I'm afraid. No one noticed any particular stranger. Don't think we are justified in holding on to the car any longer."

Hawke rose from his seat.

"I'd like a look at it before I go back," he declared.

"All right," the Super agreed.

His own men had been over the car, so he was not very hopeful. But—thinking of bedridden Mary Grant—he was anxious to fall in with any suggestion at all.

"Take Mr Hawke down, constable," he added, "and let him look at the car."

It was a blue saloon of a well-known make—certainly not the car to attract undue attention.

"By the owner's recollection of the mileage," the constable said, "the car was driven pretty well straight from the pick-up place to the spot where we found it this morning."

Hawke grunted in reply. His head

was inside the car. Presently his body followed his head inside.

The constable was bored. He let his attention wander. He did not notice Hawke fetch up a crumpled piece of paper.

Hawke smoothed it out on his knee. It was the corner of a page carelessly torn from some book. A book that——

He sat up straight. He gazed thoughtfully out of the window of the car, though the expression on his face did not indicate which way his thoughts were running. Then he placed the piece of paper carefully in an envelope and clambered out.

"Have to get down to the station or I'll lose my train," he declared.

He found time before the train left to interview at some length the Traffic Superintendent.

Baxter's voice, when Hawke rang him later at the Yard, was exasperated and sharp.

"Yes! I've got them all here safe enough," he growled. "Fingers and Soupy Soames, the Colonel and Flash Frank. And they've all been good boys—according to what they say."

"Soupy, he's had the flu. Been laying up for a while taking it easy in bed. Landlady and her daughter, both of them swear that's true. The boys fetched him from bed this morning."

"You ought to hear him moan! Practically charging me, before the fact, with being the cause of his death from pneumonia."

Hawke permitted himself a smile.

"He's never been violent before," he reminded the inspector.

"All of them have to start some

Death by Time-Table

time," Baxter declared emphatically. "The Colonel—he spent a decorous night at his brother-in-law's place over at Crouch End. Never knew he had a brother-in-law. Seems quite right that he has, though—and they are backing his story okay.

"Flash Frankie was out of town. Stayed the night at Brighton. Planning another job, I'd say—but his story seems correct. Fingers—he went to the pictures—have you heard that one before?—and then went home to bed.

"I've bunged the whole covey of them next door in the charge-room. They can kick their heels there for a bit. You coming round straight away?"

"Hang on to them for a bit," said Hawke. "There's something I want to do which may take quite a bit of time. Yes! I hope I'm on to something—but I've got to get the proof. And I want those guys' addresses."

He noted down the addresses the Inspector supplied, but refused to comment further as to what he had in mind.

The Number Puzzle

IT was quite late before Dixon Hawke reached the Yard. Baxter was still on duty. He rang down to the Cannon Row Station—the station for the Yard—and had the four suspects sent up.

Hawke did not hurry to start. He eyed the four men up and down, from the immaculately-dressed Flash Frankie to the somewhat down-at-heel Fingers.

When Hawke did speak, what he

said was hardly what anyone expected.

"Nice suit you're wearing, Colonel." His tone was speculative. "Saville Row, I'd say. Too expensive a street for me—but I'm only a detective. Tell me, Colonel, did you wear that same suit yesterday?"

The Colonel, who on occasions had been Her Majesty's guest, but had never carried her commission, was a grey-haired, neat-looking man, with a distinctly military bearing. He seemed as nonplussed as the others at Dixon Hawke's odd question—and wondered where the trap was, but thought that the truth about a matter capable of easy proof was the safest way.

"Yeah! So what?" he demanded.

"Make a note of it, Baxter," said Hawke.

"But——" the Inspector began.

"Oh, yes! The murder," said Hawke—and his voice had lost all trace of pleasantry and softness. It was grim and implacable. "I am coming now to that."

He took an envelope from his pocket, extracted a crumpled piece of paper, and smoothed it on Baxter's desk.

"The murder," he said again. "It was really efficiently planned. A factory conveniently backing on to a shunting yard. A good deal of noise all the while; a great deal at specified times; an internal explosion unnoticed in the continuous racket outside. A safe bet—if it hadn't been for Amos."

He stopped, but no one else spoke.

"The murderer," Hawke went on, "picked up a private car in Market Street last night, drove it

The split-second cracksmen couldn't trust his memory

into the lane, broke in through a first-floor window, blew the safe open wide—and murdered Amos Grant. He drove the car to Allerton, then abandoned it, catching a fast train to town. He left this scrap of paper in it—dropped it probably without realising he had done so.

"No! Sit down, all of you. I'll tell you what it is. It's the corner of a page carelessly torn from a book.

"There are various figures on it—quite a number of them printed, including the number of the page—but some scribbled in the margin in pencil. A permanent reminder for a faulty memory."

Baxter was leaning forward, an expectant light in his eyes.

"They're just numbers apparently," Dixon Hawke went on. "See—here's 136 and here 151. There's 223 and 301. They puzzled me for a bit. Then I got an idea—and saw the traffic superintendent.

"Yes! You've got it! They're times—that first one is one-thirty-six—and they note the times when the heavy trains come crashing into the yard. Time your explosion with one of those—and it certainly won't be heard."

"I—see," the inspector breathed.

"The man who did the job preferred not to trust to his memory," Dixon Hawke went on. "Before he left his home on the way to do the job he jotted down the times on a scrap of paper torn from the book he had been consulting immediately before. A Bradshaw time-table, Colonel.

"The page—247, shows the times of the trains to the place where you went last night. And the trains

back to town, of course. I was looking at it myself early this afternoon. That's why I recognised it.

"In your job, Colonel, you find yourself getting about quite a lot. Too many public inquiries at the various railway stations might cause unpleasant comment. Easier and safer to keep your own copy of Bradshaw. Safer—that's what you thought.

"I called at your place this evening. I found your Bradshaw there. I've got it with me, by the way. You'll be interested to know the top right-hand corner of one of the pages—page two hundred and forty-seven—is missing. That scrap fits the gap exactly."

The Colonel's face was grey. There was nothing he could do—and he had the sense to know it. He listened to the inspector's words, and prepared to be led away.

Baxter turned to the private detective.

"One thing, Hawke," he said. "Why did you call attention to the suit the Colonel's wearing?"

"Additional proof, I guess," replied Dixon Hawke. "A couple of bits of glass were missing from the fragments which made up the top of the torch. It's a good gamble that you'll find them quite securely lodged in the turn-ups of the Colonel's trousers."

Actually, that guess turned out, in fact, to be true.

"Amos Grant is dead," declared Baxter. "Nothing we can do will give him back again to his stricken Mary. But I'm glad, for my own peace of mind, that the brute who did the job won't get away with it."

THE RIDDLE OF The Playful Pekinese



A Collector's Loss!

"I UNDERSTAND you have not advised the police of your loss, Mr Gibbon?" remarked Dixon Hawke, as he took the chair offered him in the library of the large modern villa near Guildford.

Barclay Gibbon glanced at his

wife and spread his hands in a gesture of despair.

"How could I? They are all personal friends of mine or of Agathe's. If one of them took the coin I want it back, but I want the matter hushed up. That is why I approached you rather than the police, Mr Hawke."

Who was the thief at the tea-party?

The ace private detective nodded understandingly. As usual, his bright young assistant, Tommy Burke, had seated himself in a corner of the room with notebook and pencil, prepared to take down in shorthand all that was said.

From the next room came the subdued murmur of voices. Doors fitted well in Ionia Villa, and there was no fear of being overheard.

"You had better tell me the whole story again from the beginning," suggested Dixon Hawke, "amplifying what you told me on the phone."

The big man with the heavy-rimmed glasses leaned back and clasped his hands round one knee, lifting that foot from the floor. Hawke already knew that Barclay Gibbon was a retired silk merchant and that he was in a very sound financial position.

"It was just an ordinary tea-party, Mr Hawke, such as my wife gives every week," explained Gibbon. "The vicar is always present. Then there was my son, Anthony; Miss Phyllis Felham, who is the daughter of the former Canon Felham, and who now lives in that small cottage down the road; and Dr Codrington.

"Dr Codrington is the only one not well known to us, although I have corresponded with him for years on numismatics—coin collecting. When I heard he was staying in Guildford I invited him round. Apart from that there were—let me see!—only the Hon. Mrs Lee-Wickam and her nephew, Rupert."

"Who are they?" queried Hawke.

"Mrs Lee-Wickam is one of the

richest women in the neighbourhood, and——"

"And one of the meanest!" put in Agathe Gibbon, speaking for the first time. "She never subscribes to charities, and it is a shame how she keeps that nephew of hers so short of money. Often I've seen him walking out from Guildford because he had not the bus fare."

Barclay Gibbon again spread his hands in that somewhat foreign gesture.

"That may be so. Anyway, Mrs Lee-Wickam is a well-to-do neighbour of ours and not in the slightest interested in coin-collecting. I think that is all, my dear?"

His wife pursed her lips thoughtfully, then for a moment her eyes lit up.

"Unless you can count my small nephew, Sonny, who is three years old and staying with us. He was in and out all the time. The windows to the garden were open."

"Well, that is the lot," continued Gibbon. "It was the usual sort of tea-party, with a lot of chatter and small talk. I remember the Vicar tried to interest Mrs Lee-Wickam in his new organ fund and failed. Afterwards Mrs Lee-Wickam got her wretched Peke to do some tricks for Sonny. It made crumbs all over the settee.

"Nothing much else happened, but someone suggested that if I was going to show Dr Codrington my collection of Greek coins it would be nice if we could all see them. Of course, that was why Codrington had been invited, being a collector himself."

The Riddle of the Playful Pekinese

"Who made the suggestion about showing them to everyone?" asked the detective.

Husband and wife looked at one another as though for inspiration.

"I think it was Tony, our son," said Agathe Gibbon. "Yes, I'm sure it was Tony. He was bored with the small talk."

Barclay Gibbon nodded. He did not look too pleased.

"I would have preferred to have shown Dr Codrington the coins privately, but I knew I could do that later, so Tony and I brought the cabinet into the drawing-room. I took out some with brief explanations. Dr Codrington was particularly interested in my Etrurian specimens."

"My husband seems to imagine everyone understands about old coins," put in Mrs Gibbon with a smile. "I had better tell you that he has one of the finest collections of ancient Greek coins in the country."

"I wouldn't say that!" protested Barclay Gibbon. "I specialise in Etrurian and Calabrian coins—chiefly gold coins which were used in those regions between 100 and 300 B.C. I may have one of the most representative collections of those particular groups, it is true."

"The coins were passed from hand to hand?" queried Dixon Hawke.

"I did not pass them out that way."

He crossed the room, unlocked a tall cabinet, and slid out a shallow tray about 18 inches by 12 inches. It was velvet-lined, and in round

recesses cut to fit them reposed a number of glittering gold and silver coins of great age.

"I passed round the trays in their entirety, but I had no objection to anyone taking out a coin to examine the other side. Coins, unlike stamps, are not injured by handling. Dr Codrington handled a lot, and so did some of the others. Usually they put them back in the proper place, but that did not really matter."

"I take it that Dr Codrington and yourself entered into a certain amount of discussion?" queried the detective.

"That is so, but not to any great extent. We knew we could discuss the coins later here in the library, for he was staying the evening."

"Well, we examined the coins for about forty minutes, then when I came to slide the trays back into the cabinet I discovered that one of the most valuable was missing. It was a Calabrian stater, of Tarentum, a big gold coin weighing nine grammes. It had the head of Zeus on one side and——"

"Valuable?" asked Dixon Hawke.

"Extremely. Because of its rarity, and it was in practically mint condition, it was worth over £800."

A low whistle came from Tommy, but was stifled immediately.

"What did you do then, Mr Gibbon?"

"Naturally I asked if anyone still had it, or whether anyone had dropped it. All denied having it, and everyone joined in a search of the floor and the furniture. It was easy for a coin to slip down behind

the cushions or upholstery. We did not find it. The coin had vanished."

"Now think carefully," said Hawke. "Who had left the room during the period the coins were being passed round, or before you discovered your loss?"

"Nobody. We have checked on that. Everyone is positive that no one left the room."

"Did anyone else come in during that time?" persisted the detective.

"Only Anna the maid, who cleared away the tea things. But do not suspect her. She has been with us for fifteen years," said Mrs Gibbon hurriedly.

Dixon Hawke frowned thoughtfully.

"So the room was thoroughly searched—thoroughly? You are sure the coin could not have rolled anywhere?"

"Quite positive. Nine of us almost tore the room to pieces in our thoroughness. By that time everyone was very worried. It was Mrs Lee-Wickam who pointed out how awkward it was for everybody, and suggested that we all be searched to the skin, the women in one room and the men in another.

"At first I did not want to do this, but my guests insisted, so my wife took the ladies into this room, and I searched the men in the drawing-room. I also searched my son, and insisted that I should be searched myself. My wife did likewise, but the coin was not found."

Dixon Hawke considered this.

"The women came in here. Was there any chance of anyone dropping or hiding the coin before your wife searched them?"

"Somebody thought of that, and both rooms were searched again afterwards. It was useless. The Tarentum stater had vanished."

"It was a large coin?"

"Yes, as large as a five-shilling piece—not easily concealed. Well, Mr Hawke, our guests all went at last, terribly upset, and begging me to call the police, but I preferred to ask you to investigate privately. It is a dreadful business for my wife and me."

"Quite!" agreed Dixon Hawke. "That was the day before yesterday. When I suggested that you invite them all here this afternoon to meet me did anyone object?"

"Nobody. They were all eager to help, and they are all waiting for you in there now."

Dixon Hawke looked across at Tommy Burke and nodded.

"Thank you. I think we'll go in and meet them now. You have arranged for tea to be served just as it was on Tuesday, Mrs Gibbon? I want everything to be exactly the same, and for everyone to do as they did before."

"That is understood," agreed Agatha Gibbon, and opened the door between the two rooms.

Wong's Party Piece

AS might have been expected, it was not a comfortable tea-party.

The Reverend Mr Lacey, a small, mouse-like man, with a large wart at the side of his nose, tried to keep the conversation going much as it had been on Tuesday. The Hon. Mrs Lee-Wickam, an overbearing,

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over-dressed, much-painted lady, with remarkably small and penetrating eyes, tried to do the same, but neither of them succeeded. Too many people were aware that Dixon Hawke was studying them, and they kept looking at him nervously.

This was particularly the case with Rupert Lee-Wickam, a lanky, weak-chinned youth with permanently dry lips, which he kept licking. More than once he mopped his brow as though he found the room hot, which it was not, for the windows had been left open, giving a fine view of the garden.

Dr Codrington conscientiously did his best to say the things he had said at the original tea-party, but Hawke could not check whether he did so accurately. The detective then explained that this did not matter very much as long as they did things in the same order as before.

Miss Phyllis Felham, a shrivelled spinster of about sixty, perpetually sniffed and seemed about to burst into tears. She almost choked when pressed to have another cake. Only Tony Gibbon and Mrs Lee-Wickam, of the adults, had normal appetites.

One person who seemed unaware of anything unusual was Sonny Gibbon, who stuffed himself with sweet cakes and kept running in and out of the open windows with Wong, a fat and wheezy Pekinese. It was obvious that for the three-year-old the big moment came when Mrs Lee-Wickam asked if he would like to see Wong do some tricks.

A biscuit was put on the top edge of the high door, which was opened a few inches for the purpose, and Wong was told by his mistress

to get it. The peke at once waddled across the room, gave the door a violent push with one of his paws to close it, and so dislodged the biscuit, which was deftly caught as it fell.

Everyone clapped, whereupon Mrs Lee-Wickam said sharply—

"Salute, Wong, salute!"

The dog sat on its bushy tail and made a comical motion of saluting.

Next, Sonny was told to take Wong out into the garden for a few moments, and a sweet biscuit was hidden under the edge of the carpet in a far corner. Mrs Lee-Wickam called the dog in, and without being told what to do it began to search and sniff around the room. Within three minutes it had located the biscuit.

"... As intelligent as many children," the Hon. Mrs Lee-Wickam was saying. "I always declare that I could teach Wong to do anything that the average child of seven can do."

She was flushed with her small triumph, and Wong went over and lay beside the sofa on which his mistress and Dixon Hawke were sitting. That was Anthony Gibbon's cue.

"What about showing us some of your coins, father?" he asked.

As on Tuesday, Barclay Gibbon made a show of reluctance, then asked his son to help him bring in the cabinet. This was done. He unlocked it with several formidable keys, and slid out some of the trays containing his treasures.

These were passed carefully around, and Gibbon moved from one group to another explaining

Why did Hawke study the antics of a performing dog?

that some of the coins were of great historical interest.

"This one"—Dixon Hawke heard him saying—"this is one of the first Syracusan decadrachms ever issued, and was brought out to commemorate the great victory over the Athenians by Nicias at the Assinarus in 414 B.C."

"Is that one very valuable?" asked Mrs Lee-Wickam.

"Fairly!" said the collector. "It is worth between £200 and £300, even though it is only made of silver."

"Why?" asked young Rupert Lee-Wickam, speaking on one of the rare occasions during the party.

"Because so few were issued and because of its fine condition. I will not collect coins which are much worn. Don't you agree with me, Dr Codrington?"

The two collectors entered into a discussion, during which time Barclay Gibbon forgot why they were there, and became very enthusiastic over his theories.

Another Coin Vanishes

THE coins continued to be passed round. Now and again someone picked up one to examine the reverse side. Dixon Hawke did this more than once. He found them exceedingly interesting, and smiled when Mrs Lee-Wickam whispered—

"Don't you think it thrilling actually to handle something that people used nearly 3000 years ago, Mr Hawke?"

Dixon Hawke agreed and nodded across the room to Tommy Burke,

who strolled over to the window and looked into the garden.

Time passed. Tony Gibbon had been checking it, and suddenly announced—

"It was about now that you started to put your coins away, father."

Barclay Gibbon turned reluctantly from Dr Codrington.

"Is that so? Well, we must go through with things as Mr Hawke requires. Bring me each tray as it is filled, Tony. I think I rearranged them as you brought them to me."

Hawke was watching Barclay Gibbon. The last tray had been handed to the collector, and he was staring at it through his thick-rimmed glasses.

"Good gracious me!" he exclaimed. "That Syracusan decadrachm—the one I was talking about. Where is it? It appears to be missing."

There was uproar, during which Dixon Hawke stepped to the windows and closed them. By then everybody was looking down the back of the settee, under the cushions, and on the floor.

"Don't trouble to look for that missing coin," said Dixon Hawke gravely. "Neither is it any good us searching one another. The coin is no longer in the room."

Everyone looked at him in amazement. Barclay Gibbon stared at the empty space in the tray, and seemed to be in a state of nerves.

"You—you know who took it, Mr Hawke?" he gasped.

"Yes, I know who took it," murmured Hawke. "I took it."

"You!" At least half a dozen

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different lips shaped the word.

"I took it to try an experiment, and it is now no longer in the room," went on the detective. "Where was it taken, Tommy?"

"Third rosebush from the right in the second row," replied his assistant from the window.

"I do not understand," came from Barclay Gibbon.

"Let us sit down as we were while the coins were being passed around," suggested Hawke, and seated himself on the settee beside Mrs Lee-Wickam.

They all settled themselves awkwardly and nervously.

"As I sat here, I considered at first the possibility of Sonny picking up the coin and taking it outside and dropping it," continued the detective. "But something made me change my mind, and I decided to try an experiment. I took up the coin which you now miss, Mr Gibbon, and retained it in my hand for a few moments. Nobody noticed.

"I let my hand hang over the edge of the settee and prodded Wong, who was lying there. He was instantly alert, and when I pushed the coin towards his face he took it in his mouth, got up, and went out through the french windows."

There was a snort from the big, painted woman beside Hawke. She tried to rise to her feet, but he dropped a hand on her shoulder.

"I gave a signal to Tommy, and he went at once to the window, having seen the dog go out. He watched Wong bury that coin under the third rosebush in the second row of your rose garden, Mr Gibbon,

and I feel sure you'll find the other coin with it."

There was a moment of petrified silence, then Mrs Lee-Wickam pushed Hawke's hand to one side and stood up, swaying.

"It's a lie—to accuse Wong—it's a lie!" she cried.

"I'm not accusing Wong of any crime, Mrs Lee-Wickam," murmured Dixon Hawke. "He only responded to the training which you have given him. You boasted that you could train a dog to do anything that a child of seven could do. You are the only one who could have taught him that trick.

"The idea came to me when he was doing his other tricks, and I saw how perfectly you had him under control. You had better see if the other coin is buried with the last one, Tommy."

Screams rang through the room. Mrs Lee-Wickam was having hysterics.

The missing coins were found under that rosebush, where the well-trained dog had buried them.

Mrs Lee-Wickam was proved to be a kleptomaniac. The sight of that gold coin which Barclay Gibbon had said was valued at £800, had been too much for her. Doubtless she had intended to go out into the garden on some future visit and get Wong to show her where he had hidden it, but Hawke's experiment with the second coin had spoilt all that.

No police action was taken, but a little later Rupert Lee-Wickam managed to have his aunt put into a home where her strange habits would be watched and controlled, and after that he was never short of bus fares!

DEATH Before Dinner



A Fatal Accident

THE man at the table in the corner of the dining-room had summoned the head waiter three times, had rapped with his spoon twice to demand service from the waitress, and had told those at the next table that if he did not get satisfaction he would see the manager.

Dixon Hawke, Britain's ace private detective, and his young assistant, Tommy Burke, were not the only people who looked at this noisy diner with disgust. It was obvious that he was disliked even by those at the adjoining table, who

called him "Mr Poulton." Sundry murmurs from other diners nearer the detectives told Hawke that this was an everyday performance. The man appeared to be a permanent guest.

"The head waiter looks as though he'd like to murder him!" said Tommy Burke, as yet another dish was returned to the kitchen.

"Yes, it's a pity people like that are allowed in hotels," agreed Dixon Hawke. "One of that type can upset everyone else."

Death Before Dinner

It was their first lunch at the Three Bears Hotel. They had arrived only an hour earlier, and intended spending the week-end on the local golf course. Hawke had decided that they both needed a break after a long spell of work in London, and the village of Bramscot, in the Cotswolds, was noted for its wine-like air.

Other tables were getting very slow service. Hawke and Tommy had plenty of time to study the cause of all the trouble.

Poulton was a small man of about fifty, rat-faced and pale, with bulging eyes and an arrogant mouth. His ears protruded, and he had a habit of twitching his nose. He was well dressed in somewhat loud tweeds, and his tie was a flamboyant red. On his wrist he wore a gold wrist-watch. Hawke found some difficulty in placing him, but concluded that he was a shopkeeper who had retired from business at an unusually early age.

The head waiter bustled up to Hawke with a murmured apology and some grilled cutlets. Hawke noticed beads of perspiration on the man's forehead, and saw that he was biting his lip. Leslie Poulton had driven him as far as he could go.

When he left Hawke's table, the head waiter, who was addressed by older guests as Lawrence, went behind the service screen and encountered the proprietor. From his position to one side, Hawke could see them both, and watched Lawrence grasp the hotel owner by the sleeve and hiss something in his ear. The backward toss of his head left no doubt as to whom

he was discussing. He waved his arms excitedly, and almost dropped the plates.

Edward Grigg, the proprietor of the Three Bears, tried to soothe the man, but he also looked worried and furious.

"Why doesn't he turn Poulton out if the man upsets the staff like this?" thought Dixon Hawke, then dismissed the matter from his mind as he and Tommy discussed their plans for the afternoon.

It was nearly six before the two detectives returned from the golf course, and they went at once to their room to change. The Three Bears was an old-fashioned hotel, with low rafters, timbered rooms, and antique furniture, but the plumbing was modern.

There were many different levels to the floors and many staircases. Hawke's room, which he shared with Tommy, was in a short corridor which appeared to lead to a rear staircase that went down to the staff quarters.

As they mounted the stairs from the hall they were preceded by Leslie Poulton, and saw that he had the room opposite them, the only other room along that corridor. He slammed the door so loudly that plaster fell from the ceiling.

The detectives had a private bathroom and were thus able to have a bath without leaving their apartment. Dinner was not until 7.30, so they did not hurry themselves.

It was about twenty minutes later, and Tommy was in the bath, Hawke in the bedroom, when the lights suddenly failed, leaving them in complete darkness.

Three minutes of darkness herald a tragedy

"Hullo, either a cut or a fuse!" exclaimed Dixon Hawke as he fumbled for some matches. "Luckily they've left us candles. Hold on, Tommy, whilst I light one for you!"

Tommy grinned.

"I'm surprised his nibs opposite hasn't let out a bellow at this!" he remarked.

"Maybe his room's on a different circuit," murmured the detective, and just then the lights came on again. "H'm, it wasn't worth fiddling with the candles!"

They went on with their toilet. By seven o'clock both of them were ready to descend to the lounge. Somewhere below a wireless was blaring loudly. Beyond the window were the noises of the village street.

Suddenly all other sounds were drowned by a terrific crash.

"What in the world——?" muttered Hawke, listening at the door. "I thought I heard someone come out of the room opposite a few moments ago. I suppose Poulton hasn't——"

The wireless set below was abruptly silenced, and they heard loud voices in the hall. Hawke opened their door and stepped outside. The top of the staircase was on his right.

A figure in loud tweeds sprawled at the foot of the flight, head downwards. It was Leslie Poulton and he did not move. The receptionist from the office and three of the guests were grouped around him. Other guests and the proprietor were running from the rear.

Dixon Hawke was down the stairs in a matter of seconds, put his arms around the fallen man's shoulders,

and heaved him into a sitting position. Poulton's head lolled to one side.

"Get a doctor!" snapped Hawke, after a closer look. "Move aside while I lift him on to that settee."

Somebody said there was a doctor amongst the hotel guests, and while he was being sought, Dixon Hawke stretched Poulton out on the settee and unfastened his clothing. He next dragged open the man's collar and loosened the tie, having to remove a gold tie-pin which held together the front of the collar. Tommy Burke noticed that Hawke paused for a moment in the middle of doing this, and looked somewhat puzzled, but a few minutes later the doctor arrived and took over.

They did not have to wait long for his verdict. Leslie Poulton was dead.

The news shocked the assembled guests. Grigg, the proprietor, was the first to break the silence—

"I've always told the maid not to polish the top of those stairs! But why did he die from such a short fall? Did he hit his head?"

"I see no indication of any external injury," the doctor told him. "Maybe he had a weak heart. That will have to be ascertained. Meantime I suggest he be moved to a room. You had better advise the police."

An Untidy Mystery

THE tragedy cast a gloom over the hotel. Leslie Poulton had been heartily disliked by everyone, but the suddenness of his end had shocked the most callous.

The body was removed for a post-mortem during the night, and it was not until Hawke and Tommy returned from golfing the following morning that they found a detective-inspector and an ordinary police sergeant questioning everybody. Dixon Hawke took one look at the florid-faced inspector and exclaimed:

"Hansbury! It is Detective-Inspector Hansbury, isn't it? Didn't we meet on the Cheltenham affair last year?"

Hansbury shook hands and led them aside.

"We did. When I saw your name in the hotel register I could hardly believe my eyes. You must have a nose for trouble!"

"Trouble? You mean Poulton's death? I can tell you very little about that, although I was the one who picked him up. What did they find wrong with him—a dislocated neck?"

"Nothing at all! That's why I'm here. The post-mortem showed him to be a perfectly healthy man, with no sign of heart weakness or anything else to account for his death. He had broken no bones. That fall should have bruised and shaken him, but not killed him."

Hawke's eyes opened wider. He knew what this implied.

"Any chance of poison?" he queried. "He was very much disliked here."

"No, no trace of poison, nothing!" declared Hansbury. "There is not a mark on his body except a few bruises. I would like you to tell me all you know about the matter. I've got statements from everyone else."

"We can tell you precious little, but——" Hawke had a thoughtful look on his face. "There's just one thing that occurred to me. I noticed it at the time and wondered—can you find out from the other guests if Poulton was left-handed?"

The Inspector knew Hawke would not have asked that question idly. He went back into the lounge, and when he returned he was shaking his head.

"Everybody says he was normally right-handed. They are sure of that."

"That was my own belief, for I saw him eating at table and smoking in the lounge. This is why I asked."

"I was the one who unfastened Poulton's clothing after he fell and opened his collar. His tie was tied as a left-handed person would have tied it. Furthermore, there was a tie-pin holding down the points of his soft collar. This had been pushed through from left to right, not from right to left, as a normal right-handed person would put in a pin. It struck me as queer at the time."

Inspector Hansbury started to say something, but Hawke checked him.

"One thing more. We saw Poulton going to his room about six. It was 7.10 when he fell down the stairs. Yet he had not changed his suit. I wonder if he was in the habit of dining in those tweeds and that red tie?"

Detective-Inspector Hansbury was a man of few words. Again he turned and went back to the lounge. This time he was gone longer. When he came back he told Hawke:

A left-handed clue gives Hawke an idea

"That's funny! The receptionist and the maid both say Poulton used to go up about six each evening for a bath and to change into a navy-blue suit. Why didn't he change last night?"

"I wonder if he took a bath?" murmured Hawke.

"Yes, he bathed all right," said Hansbury. "Come on up."

The police had locked the door of Number 7, and had retained the key. Edward Grigg met them on the stairs and asked how long it would be before the room was available for re-letting.

"We'll finish with it as soon as we can, Mr Grigg," Hansbury assured him. "Poulton's things will be packed and taken away, then the room will be at your disposal again."

Grigg nodded. He was a big, slow-moving, genial man, and everyone in the hotel spoke highly of him.

Hansbury and his two companions went into the dead man's room, and Dixon Hawke found it to be exactly similar to his own across the corridor, even to the adjoining bath.

It was a very tidy room. Poulton had been very precise in his habits. Everything was folded neatly and put away, with the exception of his dressing-gown, which lay over a chair, his damp bath-towel, which was on the floor of the bathroom, and his slippers, which were also in the bathroom, under the wash-hand basin.

"You see he bathed," pointed out Hansbury. "But why he again dressed himself in that tweed suit instead of changing, I don't know."

Hawke looked about him keenly for some seconds.

"There's something wrong here. Poulton presumably undressed in the bedroom, put on slippers and dressing-gown, and came in here for his bath. I wonder why he left his slippers here and went back barefooted to dress?"

"I can't understand him kicking his slippers into that corner when he was so tidy about everything else. Then that towel on the floor—— Could you ring for the maid?"

Hansbury did so. He knew better than to ask Hawke questions at this time. He had seen the Dover Street detective in action before. A frightened girl appeared at the door, but Dixon Hawke soon put her at her ease.

"Mr Poulton was a tidy man in his room?" he began.

"Oh, yes, sir, I didn't like him because he was so—so exacting and bullying. But he was very neat and tidy."

"What did he usually do with his slippers when he wasn't using them?"

"He always put them under the foot of his bed, sir."

"You never knew him leave them in the bathroom?"

"Oh, no, sir!"

"And his bath-towel when he had used it?"

"He always folded it and hung it on the hot rail, sir."

Dixon Hawke looked back through the open door of the bathroom at the stool in front of the bath, at the big cupboard in the far corner, and the wash-hand basin. It was

Death Before Dinner

exactly like his own bathroom but for one thing, and now he remembered what that was.

"Tell me, didn't Mr Poulton have an electric heater in his bathroom? I have one in mine, and I see there's a plug for one near the cupboard."

"Yes, sir," nodded the maid. "There's one in there, too. Mr Poulton didn't use it. It was kept in the corner against the cupboard and never switched on."

"When did you last see it?" the detective asked her.

"When I did his room over yesterday morning, sir."

Dixon Hawke thanked her and sent her away, then nodded to Hansbury.

"You can see for yourself there's no heater here now. It's been unplugged and taken away. By whom?"

"Perhaps it's in the cupboard," suggested the Inspector, and opened the door in the corner. "No, empty but for an old roller blind and a lot of dust."

It was daylight, but Hawke flashed his torch into the cupboard.

"Speaking of dust. Take a look at these marks—and these!" He pointed. "If someone hasn't been standing in there lately with the door closed—I'm a Dutchman!"

Hansbury admitted it looked like it.

"But just what are you getting at?" he asked.

"I have remembered two things," murmured Hawke. "One is a way by which a healthy man can be killed without any trace of injury being found on him, and the other

is that the lights went out in our room at 6.20 last night. I wonder where the fuse-box is for this room?"

Tommy found it in a small cupboard halfway down the corridor. It was also Tommy who pointed out that the fuse had been recently repaired. The fuse-wire inside was clean and shiny. On the floor lay the broken ends of the previous wire which had fused.

"The next thing is to find the heater," said Hawke.

"Heater?" repeated Hansbury, looking somewhat puzzled.

"The electric heater which vanished from Poulton's bathroom. Let's go down and speak to the proprietor. He may be able to help us."

Trapped By the Time

INSPECTOR HANSBURY, Dixon Hawke, and his assistant found Edward Grigg poring over some accounts in his office. He looked startled when the three of them crowded in, but Hawke seated himself on the edge of the desk and said affably enough:

"The Inspector and I want some help, Mr Grigg."

The hotel proprietor looked surprised.

"Are you connected with the police?"

"Indirectly!" put in Hansbury sharply. "Mr Hawke and I have worked together before. You didn't recognise his name in your register?"

Grigg blinked, then reached for the hotel register. He ran his eye down a column.

The mystery of the missing electric heater

"D. Hawke and T. Burke, Dover Street, London, W.I.," he read, and suddenly flushed. "Not—— What a fool I am! I didn't notice your initial before. You're not the famous Mr Hawke we read about so often in the papers — the private detective?"

"That's him," nodded Hansbury, "so now please answer any questions Mr Hawke puts to you."

"Certainly, only too delighted!" declared Grigg. "To think I never guessed. What is it you want to know, Mr Hawke?"

"About your staff. Where are they likely to be between six o'clock and six-thirty in the evening?"

Edward Grigg stared, then grinned.

"If you've been trying to get service then, it's a very bad time. The head waiter and the maids are in their quarters changing for the evening. The kitchen staff are preparing dinner.

"The receptionist is off for an hour to have her dinner and tidy herself. I usually relieve her here. Our outside porter goes off at six. It's the new regulations. I'm sorry if you've been inconvenienced."

"I've not been inconvenienced," Hawke assured him. "Then about 6.20 last evening you were the only one on duty outside the kitchen?" Grigg nodded.

"So, when the lights fused on my floor, you were the one who ran up and put in a new fuse?"

For a moment Grigg looked as though he would deny this. He had gone very pale.

"Ye-es, I did," he finally admitted.

"How did you know the lights had gone out?" asked the detective. "You can't see from here."

Edward Grigg swallowed.

"Er—Mr Poulton came down and told me. He always made a fuss about everything. I ran up and put in a new fuse wire. I hope you were not put out in any way?"

"Not at all," replied Hawke. "The lights were not out long enough to inconvenience anyone, certainly not long enough for Poulton to have come downstairs to fetch you. They were not out for more than three minutes."

"Wh-what do you mean?" gasped the hotel proprietor.

"That you were not down here when it happened, but in Poulton's bathroom," Hawke told him grimly. "The moment the lights fused you slipped out of Number 7, walked three paces, opened that cupboard, and put in a new fuse. It did not take you more than three minutes at the most. Then you went back into Number 7."

The detective paused for a moment, then barked out the question:

"Just what hold did Poulton have over you?"

The hotel owner's hand went to his collar. His face glistened with sweat.

"I—I don't know what you mean," he quavered.

"Yes, you do. You may as well tell us. It is probably the only thing that will save you from hanging — an extenuating circumstance."

"H-hanging!" Grigg's voice was hoarse. "What do you mean?"

"That Poulton was blackmailing you, and forcing you to keep him here, even though he was nearly ruining the hotel. He made you so desperate that you decided to murder him.

"You knew his habits and hid in his bathroom cupboard just before six. He came in and went for his usual bath. You reached out of the cupboard behind his back, switched on the heater, which was on the floor, and dropped it into the bath.

"Poulton received the full 220 volts through the best conductor in the world—water. He was almost entirely submerged at the time, and such a large area of his body was shocked at once that no burns or marks of any kind were caused. That is a well-known medical fact."

"It's a lie!"

"It is not a lie. The lights immediately fused. You lifted the ruined heater out of the bath, then ran to replace the fuse. When the lights came on you returned to Number 7, dragged Poulton out of the bath—he's a small man—dried him, and carried him into the bedroom, where you dressed him.

"Then you made some mistakes. You put him back in his tweed suit, which was handiest. You left his slippers in the bathroom, and his wet towel on the floor. He would not have done that. When you dressed him you tied his tie and put back his tie-pin from the front which reversed matters.

"You ran off the bath water, and took the burnt-out heater away with you, intending to replace it at

the first opportunity. We shall find the blackened one somewhere in the hotel. But before you did this you looked into the corridor to make sure nobody was about, then carried Poulton to the top of the stairs and pitched him down to make it appear he died then.

"It did not take you five seconds to run past my room and down the back staircase. The carpet in the corridor, and the noise of the radio which you had left on, prevented Tommy and me from hearing you. You were able to double back along the lower passage and come running on the scene almost as soon as anyone."

"How—how did you pick on me?"

"Firstly, because I knew he must have had some hold on you, or you would not have kept him here. Secondly, because only someone with a master-key to Poulton's room, and an intimate knowledge of the movements of the staff, of the whereabouts of the guests, and of the exact position of the fuse-box could have carried off the affair.

"The possibility that some other member of the staff was responsible was removed when you told us everyone else was occupied elsewhere at that time. Am I right?"

Edward Grigg leaned forward, and the colour flooded back to his face.

"You're right!" he gasped. "You're absolutely right, but you don't know how much he deserved killing. You don't know what the scoundrel was doing to me. Listen——"



HALF AN HOUR TO LIVE!

Timepiece Trouble

"THERE it is in a nutshell, Hawke," said Detective-Inspector Baxter, chief of the Flying Squad, as he handed Dixon Hawke a file of papers. "These are the detailed statements and reports from the Agricultural Research Station at Rothamsted.

"The country is being flooded with valuable watches on which import

duty or purchase tax has not been paid. If you get hold of one, you've got a bargain, but the gang who are distributing them are making thousands which the Government loses."

"And what the Government doesn't get in Customs duties, it adds on to our income tax, eh?" laughed the famous private detective. "I'm always in favour of cutting the income tax. Let me have another look at that watch, Tommy."

Half An Hour To Live!

His young assistant handed over the de luxe wrist watch he had been admiring.

"It's certainly a nifty bit of work, Guv'nor. Cost you twenty-five quid in Bond Street any day."

"More like thirty," put in Baxter, "but you can get one in the Poplar pubs for twenty, and that means the seller is making fifty per cent. profit."

Dixon Hawke was examining the watch carefully.

"And neither you nor the Customs people have been able to find out how they have been brought into the country?" he queried. "Even these specks of grain dust haven't helped?"

The man from the Yard nodded his agreement.

"We thought we and the Customs people knew all the dodges. Watches in the petrol tanks of cars, sewn inside special waistcoats, and so on.

"They had these invisible rays, you know, which betray the presence of metal as you pass the point where the immigration officer checks your passport. Why, only the other day a Frenchwoman was caught because the peculiar rivets in her suitcase betrayed the false bottom."

"This grain dust suggests the watches came in a wheat ship from Canada or the States?" queried Hawke.

"Yes, of course, we've followed that up," declared Baxter. "We've searched every grain freighter coming into London docks for weeks past. We've even had chaps raking over the top of the grain in the holds. Not a trace of watches was found, though."

"We'll go back to Dover Street,

Baxter," decided Dixon Hawke, after a pause. "I can't promise anything, but I'll call you if there are any developments."

"You can count on me," said the inspector, as the private detective and his assistant left. "I shall be only too glad to see the end of this business. The Assistant Commissioner has been pestering me for weeks for what he calls 'results.'"

Having left New Scotland Yard, Dixon Hawke and Tommy Burke were soon back in their Dover Street flat. Hawke spent a couple of hours poring over the documents Inspector Baxter had given him.

"Ring up Lloyds, Tommy," he said suddenly. "The Agricultural Research people say the grain dust is from a wheat known as Manitoba Number 3, a Canadian hard wheat regarded as specially suitable, with chemical treatment, for milling into self-raising flour. Find out what ships from Canada with wheat called at Continental ports before docking here."

Ten minutes later Tommy had the information.

"Here you are, Guv'nor," he announced. "The Beaverbrae, ex Halifax, Nova Scotia, called at Amsterdam, and docked at Spilling's mills."

"If it had been diamonds we were after, that might have been a line," declared Hawke. "Go on."

"The Clan MacDuff, out of Montreal, called at Hamburg, and is in the Pool. The Trademaster, from St John, New Brunswick, called at Rotterdam, and is now discharging at Thompson & Co.'s mill in the Victoria Dock."

The Yard's only clue—a speck of dust from Canada!

"Ah, they're the manufacturers of 'Aerated' self-raising flour, aren't they?"

"Yes, but that's one of the ships Baxter said they'd searched only yesterday."

"That's true. Still, we'd best bear them all in mind. I think we've done all the good theorising will do. We'd better go down to the scene of operations in Poplar. We might be able to pick up a clue there."

The Bait Is Taken

THE Plume of Feathers is not one of the most modern pubs in Silvertown Way. In fact, it was built in 1859, when public-houses were designed for heavy drinking and when licensing hours were unknown. "Drunk for a penny, dead drunk for tuppence" had been its slogan on opening night.

Today, however, despite its dinginess, it is seemingly no less respectable than most of the others in that area. It has a regular clientele who prefer the dark, old mahogany fittings to the chromium plate and glaring light of the more modern establishments.

It was half-past eight when a nondescript-looking individual in an old raincoat and with a greasy trilby on the back of his head entered and lounged up to the bar. He ordered a brown ale, and looked around him at the rest of the customers. There were one or two dockers, a pair of spivs, two or three women; in fact, a typical evening's collection.

Five minutes later a shorter man wearing a cap and muffler came in

and also ordered a drink. After a few seconds the two got into conversation. The first looked at his wrist-watch, then scowled.

"This 'as 'ad it," he said, displaying the timepiece to the shorter man. "It's time I got a new one."

"Looks like it, chum; it's pretty old," agreed the other. "But what with the purchase tax, it ain't worth buying one these days."

Their conversation drifted off on to other things, but one of the other customers sidled up to them.

"Did I hear you wanted a new watch, mate?" he whispered.

"Yes. Why?"

"Well, I can get you one for fifteen quid less than you'd pay elsewhere. In fact, I've got one here."

He produced a wrist watch of the same high-class Continental make that Inspector Baxter had been showing Dixon Hawke that morning.

Half an hour later the man who had been wanting a new watch left the Plume of Feathers, and outside in the drizzling rain, caught a 63 bus for Ladbroke Grove. He was followed a few moments later by the short fellow in the cap, who hurried off in the direction of Canning Town.

Dixon Hawke had just divested himself of the old raincoat in his Dover Street flat when Tommy Burke came in. The youth was made up to look several years older. It was he who had been Hawke's conversation companion in the Plume of Feathers.

"Thought we'd have to sample all the pubs from Commercial Road to the Blackwell Tunnel, Guv'nor,



As the disguised Hawke stood at the bar with Tommy Burke, the stranger tried hard to sell him one of the smuggled watches.

Hawke chooses a strange time to go for a swim

before we got a touch," chuckled Tommy. "But the third time turned out lucky."

"Yes," nodded Hawke. "I must say the would-be watch vendor had a good sales talk. He'd talk the hind leg off a brass monkey. It took me all my time to avoid parting with twenty quid of my hard-earned money. What we have to do now is to find out where he works and lives, and who he is."

"We'll phone a description of him to the Yard. It shouldn't take them long to find him, even if he isn't in the Rogues' Gallery."

The time which Hawke and Tommy had had to study the watch-seller in the Plume of Feathers had been sufficient for their trained powers of observation to give a minute description of him down to the state of the laces in his shoes! Nevertheless, it was not until late the following afternoon that Inspector Baxter phoned the Dover Street flat.

"Sorry to be so long, Hawke," he apologised, "but this chap wasn't in our files. His name is Richard Benson, he lives at 117 Abbey Road, Barking, and he works as a clerk for Thompson & Co., the Victoria Dock millers."

"That sounds encouraging," said the private detective. "The pieces are beginning to fall into place, but I need more confirmation yet."

"Don't forget we want to find how they get the stuff into the country," emphasised the inspector. "We can easily pick up the small fry peddling individual watches any day."

"I'm not forgetting it," replied

Hawke. "That's why I want to be absolutely sure before I act. Tommy and I'll go boating this evening."

He rang off before the astonished Baxter had time to speak.

"Do you mean that, Guv'nor?" asked Tommy.

"I certainly do. We'll go down to Bill Laver's place and hire his dinghy."

It was almost dark when Dixon Hawke and his assistant called at a shop near Wapping Old Stairs, which bore the sign, "W. Laver, boat builder. Licensed waterman."

Laver was an old acquaintance of Hawke's, and he showed no sign of surprise when the private detective wanted to borrow a dinghy to go boating in that murky evening. Soon Tommy Burke and his Guv'nor were in a dinghy heading out towards midstream. Tommy was using the oars, and with powerful strokes he headed the boat across the river towards the Victoria Dock, on the northern side of the Thames.

The tide was at its lowest ebb and there was little movement among the big ships. Inside half an hour Tommy Burke rested on his oars about thirty yards from where the black hull of the Trademaster loomed in the darkness.

Dixon Hawke quickly took off his shoes, coat and trousers and plunged silently into the icy, oily water.

Soon afterwards Tommy thought he saw a shadow near the anchor chain. The Trademaster was anchored fore and aft, so there was no fear of her swinging. Lights burned on the ship and at points on the great grain silos, which towered against the night sky.

Half An Hour To Live!

Five minutes later Tommy Burke was surprised when Hawke suddenly appeared on the opposite side of the dinghy and climbed in.

"Okay, Guv'nor?" asked Tommy, as he gave Hawke a helping hand.

"Yes," he muttered. "Let's get back as quick as possible. Bill Laver said he'd have a hot drink waiting for us."

Grain Danger

NEXT morning, as soon as the detective and his assistant had finished breakfast in their Dover Street flat, Dixon Hawke rang Inspector Baxter at Scotland Yard. He rapidly explained the significance of his discoveries of the night before. Having made the necessary arrangements with the inspector, he and Tommy once more entered their car and headed for London's dockland.

Dixon Hawke dropped Tommy off at a telephone booth about two hundred yards from the offices and mills of Messrs Thompson & Co., manufacturers of "Aerated," the "Super Self-Raising Flour." The buildings were situated next to the dock gates, but the entrances both to the offices and the great silos were outside the dock proper.

As Hawke drove up and parked his car, lorries, laden with sacks of flour, were about to leave for all parts of the country. He noticed the Port of London Authority policeman on duty at the gate to ensure that no unauthorised persons could get in or out.

The private detective went in to the door marked "Office Inquiries," and asked to see the manager. He

was directed to an office marked "Walter Brown, General Manager." He knocked and went in.

"Morning, Mr Hawke. What can we do for you?" he was greeted.

The detective was instantly on his guard. How did this complete stranger know him? It was possible that he had been seen coming and his face was certainly a well-known one. But it was also likely that, despite his disguise of two nights before, someone in the East End pubs, where he and Tommy had been trying to get a line to work on, had recognised either him or his assistant and put these people on their guard. There was no point now in trying to hide his objectives.

"I'm investigating some smuggling that's going on, Mr Brown," said Hawke. "I have reason to believe that your factory is being used as a cover. I wonder if I could have a look around?"

On Brown's face appeared an expression of surprise.

"Smuggling, Mr Hawke? How on earth could that be? We only handle grain, and no employees of ours have any access to the docks except through the ordinary gates, which are guarded by the P.L.A. police.

"As you probably know, the far side of our mill is on the waterside, and the grain is sucked out of the holds of the ships through special pipes straight into the silos to await the grinding processes which transform it into flour. But you may certainly inspect anything you'd like to. If our factory is being used as a cover, I'd like it exposed."

"I'd like to see how the grain

The secret of smugglers' quay

actually comes into the factory," Hawke declared.

"Oh, yes, of course, if it will help you in your investigations. We'll go up with the works manager."

Brown led the way through an outer office and into the mill proper, where grain was being ground into flour. Here they found the works manager, a large, red-faced man named Griffiths.

Brown had to shout to make himself heard over the roar of the grinding machines, but the works manager seemed to be expecting the request that was made.

The party of three then ascended a winding staircase until Hawke reckoned they were about a hundred feet up. Brown led the way along a long corridor which suddenly opened on to a catwalk about three feet wide. This ran round the inside walls of an enormous storehouse which was half-full of grain. The far wall, which fronted on to the dock, was completely solid except for what looked like three large metal boxes fixed to the wall.

It was quiet after the noise of the milling machines, and Brown explained in a normal voice:

"Those three things are the ends of the pipes which are lowered into the grain ship. An electric motor creates a suction which draws up the grain. A sieve arrangement inside those boxes prevents any unwanted things, like stones, getting through and into the milling apparatus."

"Or watches!" snarled Griffiths, and lunged at Hawke from behind with a heavy rubber cosh.

Fortunately the detective had been on his guard, and, sensing the move-

ment behind, ducked forward quickly enough to prevent the blow landing on the back of his head. Instead, it caught him a glancing blow on the left shoulder.

Sick with pain, the detective was unable to cope with the two men. After a desperate struggle he was hurled down twenty feet, to fall on the grain below.

Brown wiped the blood from his face and leered down at Hawke.

"There's another five hundred tons of grain in the Trademaster yet, Hawke," he yelled, "and it's coming through now!"

As he spoke, Griffiths pressed down a large switch on the wall behind him, and suction motors began to hum, and a stream of grain started to gush from each of the three inlets. Even if Hawke had been unhurt, the soft grain would have trapped him like quicksand. To try to scale the sheer walls was quite futile.

Only by lying full length, and thereby spreading his weight, could the detective avoid sinking. Already the level of the grain was rising, and soon he must be buried under twenty feet of it! The whole place was filled with choking dust.

"You've got about half an hour to live, Hawke. Pity you won't be alive when the grain goes through the hoppers into the milling machines," jeered Brown.

In The Nick Of Time

"WELL, we've not had our call, Tommy, and Hawke hasn't returned," said Inspector Baxter as they waited impatiently by the tele-

Half An Hour To Live!

phone booth where Dixon Hawke had left Tommy. "I've sent the river police round by water as he suggested. We'd better go inside. I'm beginning to feel a bit uneasy."

Signing to the squad car to follow, the two dashed over to the offices of Thompson & Co. They went direct to Brown's office.

"I'm Detective-Inspector Baxter, of Scotland Yard," said the Yard man brusquely. "Here's my card. I want to see Mr Dixon Hawke, who is here."

"I'm sorry, Mr Hawke left twenty minutes ago," replied the manager suavely.

"Oh, no, he didn't!" snapped Baxter. "I'm going to search this place."

"Where's your warrant?" protested Brown. "I can't stop the plant. We're in the middle of discharging the Trademaster."

"Discharging!" yelled Tommy as the realisation of the dreadful possibility dawned upon him, and he dashed out of the office into the mill.

Grabbing the first workman he saw, he was shown the way to the silo. Taking the steps three at a time, and racing along the corridor at the top, he emerged on the catwalk in time to see a figure dimly in the fog of grain dust. Seeing the switchboard near his head, he desperately turned off every switch. The hum of the motors died away, and the dust gradually subsided.

Half an hour later in Brown's office, Hawke, now fully recovered, was explaining what had happened.

One of Baxter's sergeants came in.

"Here you are, sir. Here are fifty," he said, depositing a collection of watches on the desk. "There are more yet where those came from. The lads are collecting them. From the filters up in the silo, as Mr Hawke said."

"You see," said the private detective, "it was that tiny piece of wheat which put me on to it, though you yourself realised there was some connection. Somehow the watches were getting into the country without passing through the normal Customs."

"I soon realised that if something can be transferred from the ship to the silo in the same way as the grain is, then be separated, it can be taken out at leisure. Now, the watches come from Europe, but grain comes from America. Therefore, when I found a ship which came from Canada and called at a European port, the plan became clear."

"Yes, but," interrupted Baxter, "you tell me they hid them in the grain, but we searched the top of the grain, going over it with magnetic apparatus which would have betrayed the presence of metal."

At that moment the door opened.

"This is the answer," smiled Hawke as a uniformed officer of the river police entered with a waterproof bag in his hand. "While the Customs or police were about, they dangled the watches overboard. That's what I confirmed on my swim last night."

"Then at a convenient moment those who were in the know hid the watches in the grain and in due course they were sucked through the pipes and caught in the filters."

The CORPSE SMOKED CIGARS

A Plea For Help

"VERY well, Miss Neish, I'll come at once."

Dixon Hawke replaced the telephone receiver, and, returning to the breakfast table, rapidly drained his coffee cup.

"Come on, Tommy," he said to his youthful assistant. "We're going out to Hampstead."

"What's on, Guv'nor?" asked Tommy.

"Julian Bray, the financier, has been killed in his study. That was his niece on the phone. It appears that suspicion rests on her young man, a Dr Grainger, and she thinks I'll be able to clear him. Baxter is on the job, but, if we hurry, we may get out there before the body is moved."

Half an hour later the two private detectives were being ushered into a small, book-lined room by Jenkins, the victim's butler. Detective-Inspector Baxter, Chief of the Flying Squad, greeted them as they entered the room.



"Miss Neish told me she'd sent for you, Hawke," he announced. "Well, she has a right to do so, and I won't stand in your way, though, mind you, you're only wasting your time. This Grainger bloke is our man all right."

"I'm still in the dark, Baxter," declared Dixon Hawke. "Perhaps you won't mind telling me what it's all about and what happened to him."

The Corpse Smoked Cigars

The private detective nodded to the figure slumped in an armchair, and Baxter shrugged.

"Bessie, the housemaid, found him like this when she came in to clean up just after seven this morning," he replied. "Thinking her master was ill, she called Jenkins, the butler, who at once got on the phone to Dr Roberts, the family doctor. Roberts arrived here about 7.30, and found that Bray had died from a fracture at the base of the skull.

"In the doctor's opinion, the blow was struck by someone well skilled in anatomy. The injury almost anywhere else would not have proved fatal. Bray was hit on exactly the right spot, with just the right amount of force and no more. The doctor reckons that death occurred not much more than seven hours before he saw the body, which places the time as shortly after midnight."

Baxter paused, and went on significantly—

"The point is—we know that Dr Grainger was actually in the house at that time, and he, of course, possesses the necessary anatomical knowledge. What's more, Bray did not like Grainger, and had forbidden his niece to see the man again.

"Anyhow, I'm having Grainger pulled in. He has a practice in the East End—or had, I should say. I reckon they'll be needing a new doctor in that district from now on."

"Thanks, Baxter," said Hawke quietly. "I take it that you've something on Grainger apart from what you've just told me?"

"I'll say we have," growled the inspector. "But I'll give you all the facts, then you'll know as much as I do."

Inspector Baxter explained that the previous evening Julian Bray dined with his partner, Hubert Swayne. The pair remained in the dining-room till nearly half-past ten, discussing business, and afterwards repaired to the study.

Jenkins, the butler, having put out port and cigars for his master, closed and fastened the windows at Bray's request. He then retired to his pantry.

Answering a ring at 10.45, Jenkins found Mr Swayne about to leave, and he heard his master ask Swayne to tell the butler that he was not to be disturbed and that Jenkins could go to bed. At that time Bray was seated in his easy-chair smoking a cigar.

Swayne said good-night to his host, and, closing the study door, chatted to the butler for a few minutes before taking his departure, after which Jenkins had gone to bed. The butler locked the front door, but did not shoot the bolts, as he knew that Miss Neish and Dr Grainger had gone to a theatre.

"I've seen the girl," concluded Baxter. "She admits that Grainger brought her home just after twelve and came inside for a few minutes. From the light under the study door they could see that Bray had not gone to bed.

"She admits, too, that Grainger was pretty annoyed at Bray's attitude towards him. He wanted to go in and have it out with Bray there and then. Miss Neish tells me that

The killer struck with deadly accuracy!

she talked him out of doing so, and that, after some argument, Grainger went off home. She went up to bed at 12.15.

"But Grainger did not go home, Hawke." Baxter gestured towards a curtained window recess. "He came round the side of the house and entered by that window. It has only a snib catch, and he could easily open it from outside—in fact, he did open it from outside. You can see the scratches of the knife he used on the catch. You can see, too, the marks of his feet inside the window."

"He must have made a certain amount of noise then," declared Hawke. "Didn't Bray raise an alarm when he heard someone trying to get in?"

"Nobody seems to have heard him if he did," growled the inspector. "However, I'm told that Bray was a bit hard of hearing and that he had intense powers of concentration. Jenkins says that when his master became engrossed in something he was doing it was very difficult to attract his attention."

"Yes. I've met people like that, Baxter. And was Bray engrossed, as you put it, last night?"

A faint smile appeared on the inspector's face.

"I'd say this is the answer," he said, nodding towards a book which lay on a small table at the dead man's right hand.

Hawke saw that the book was a detective thriller by a well-known author.

"Quite likely," he agreed. "By the way, Baxter, have you got in touch with the friend who dined

with Bray—Swayne I think you called him?"

"We have," nodded the inspector. "He's on his way now from Croydon, where he lives. Anyhow, now you know as much as I do, Hawke, so go ahead and try to prove me wrong, if you can."

Hawke Goes To Work

DIXON HAWKE only smiled at this sally. He noted the position of the chair in which the body was slumped. The chair was set in front of the fire, with its back to the door. On the small table, in addition to the novel, stood a large brass ashtray.

The detective appeared to be interested in some cigar ash which lay on the rug to the left of the easy-chair. Baxter watched, with apparent amusement, as Hawke studied this, had a look at the large coal scuttle by the grate, then picked up the novel, flipping through the pages thoughtfully.

Replacing the book, Dixon Hawke moved to the window recess, and at once observed the scratches the inspector had mentioned. Inside the window he saw marks on the polished surround where someone had stood, and there was a faint blur also on the blue of the thick carpet nearest to the window. Hawke examined the marks with great care and with a puzzled frown.

Baxter chuckled.

"What's on your mind, Hawke?" he queried. "You're not going to suggest that those prints were made by Bray himself, are you? As you see, his slippers are quite clean.

The Corpse Smoked Cigars

No, those are Grainger's footprints all right. He couldn't come in without leaving some evidence, you know."

"What puzzles me, Baxter," said Hawke quietly, "is how he managed to leave so little evidence. Your theory is that Grainger came in here about 12.15? Well, at that time torrential rain was falling, and had been falling since just after eleven. I'd have expected to see quite a mess in here."

"Oh, there probably was a mess, but Grainger had enough savvy to clean up before he left. He just wasn't cute enough, that's all, but then, even the cleverest of murderers make mistakes, fortunately for us."

Baxter chuckled again and went on:

"I know you're going to ask where the weapon is, so I'll save you the trouble. There is none. I expect he did the job with a spanner from his car and took it away with him. No trouble—hardly any blood—it would be easy for him."

Hawke smiled and turned his attention to the window again. He raised and lowered the bottom sash, which he then proceeded to examine through a magnifying glass.

"I say, Baxter," he said suddenly, "there are the prints of four fingertips on the inside of this sash where the intruder reached in to lift it. The sash is a bit stiff, and he must have removed a glove so that he could get a good grasp when lifting it. The prints are not too good, but you might get a fair impression."

The inspector glanced downwards and nodded.

"I hadn't noticed those, so far, Hawke, but we haven't been over the room for prints yet. The men are waiting outside now, by the way, so if you don't mind——"

Baxter stopped speaking, and Hawke took the hint.

"O K, Baxter," he said. "Thanks for your help. I'll go and have a word with my client, I think, and I'll have another talk with you before you go."

When Dixon Hawke and Tommy Burke entered the room occupied by Miss Neish, the girl's face showed her relief at their presence. She was unable, however, to tell them any more than they already knew.

"You must believe Alan is innocent, Mr Hawke," she declared most emphatically. "Oh, I know he was angry about my uncle's stupid prejudice against him, but, that apart, he had no real ill-will against Mr Bray."

She explained that she and Dr Grainger had known each other ever since childhood. Grainger's father and Bray had quarrelled violently years ago, and were still at daggers drawn.

"Alan happens to be a Grainger, that's all there is to it," she said tearfully. "Uncle didn't like Alan's father, therefore he didn't like Alan, and it was so stupid, Mr Hawke."

Hawke murmured his sympathy. "Do you know Mr Swayne, the gentleman who was here last night?" he asked after a moment.

"Oh, yes, he's a regular visitor, and I've known him all my life," she replied. "He's very nice, and

Was a family quarrel the motive for murder?

he knows all about us—I mean, Alan and I."

She blushed and went on :

"Hubert, that's Mr Swayne, once asked me to marry him, but, of course, he's lots older than I am, and he quite understood when I told him about Alan. He's been more than kind ever since, and often helps us to get out together without Uncle knowing. He did so last night."

Having comforted her with the assurance that he would do his best, Hawke went in search of the butler, whom he found in his pantry.

"The inspector has already told me the story, Jenkins," he said, "but I'd like you to tell me it again in your own words. Tell me everything that happened last night and this morning, leaving out no detail, however trivial it may seem."

"I'd especially like to know if there was anything—anything at all—that struck you as unusual. Remember, the most trifling detail may be of help."

Hawke listened intently as the butler told his story. When the man had finished, the detective plied him with what, to Tommy, seemed rather aimless questions. At length Hawke rose to go.

"Tell me, Jenkins," he asked, "how did you get on with your late master? He was a pretty hard man, by all accounts."

"Oh, no, sir," was the reply. "He's been good to me all the time I've been with him, and that's nigh on twenty years. Mind you, sir, like many rich men, he was inclined

to be very parsimonious about expenditure at times."

He paused, then hurriedly added, as a thought struck him :

"I say, sir, I hope the inspector doesn't think I killed the poor gentleman?"

There was alarm in the man's voice, and Hawke smiled.

"No, Jenkins. I rather think Dr Grainger appeals more to the inspector."

"Yes, sir, that's what I thought. Mind you, sir, I can't believe the doctor is guilty, but if he didn't do it, who did?"

"Who indeed, Jenkins?" echoed Hawke.

Betrayed by a Book

LEAVING the butler, the detective and his assistant went outside and began a leisurely circuit of the house, a substantial residence standing in its own grounds. Hawke carefully scrutinised everything as he walked slowly round the building, keeping a respectful distance from the window of the study, inside which Baxter's men were still busy.

Hawke spent some time in the big courtyard at the rear of the house, and when Tommy and he finally returned to the front again the police photographers and fingerprint experts were taking their departure. The two made their way to the study, where they found Baxter in conversation with a burly, genial-looking man whom the inspector introduced as Hubert Swayne, the dead man's partner.

The Corpse Smoked Cigars

"A bad business this, Mr Hawke," said Swayne. "It looks as if poor Grainger let his feelings get the better of him."

"You believe him guilty?" asked Hawke, and Swayne shrugged.

"The inspector thinks so," he replied, "and, though I hate to say so, I know there was no love lost between the two of them. Mind you, I blame Julian for that, and for letting a stupid family feud blind his better judgment."

"Jenkins tells me he fastened the windows," said Hawke. "I don't suppose that Mr Bray or yourself opened them for any reason?"

"I certainly didn't, Mr Hawke, and I'd be surprised to hear that Julian did. He had a horror of draughts. Actually, I was only in here for a few minutes. We had a long talk over dinner and after dinner, and I only drank a whisky and soda in the study. I don't smoke, you see.

"Julian smoked very little, and he was a bit peculiar in his habits. He liked to have his last cigar and his glass of port by himself. I shouldn't have come in here at all, but I had a surprise for Julian, a book which I knew he'd enjoy."

"Would this be the book, Mr Swayne?"

Hawke picked up the novel, which slipped from his hand and fell at Swayne's feet.

"I beg your pardon," he apologised as the other bent to lift the book.

"That's all right," laughed Swayne. "Yes, this is the book. It's Robin Armstrong's latest, and there's nothing Julian liked more

than a good detective thriller. Poor old fellow! He'd be so deep in this he'd never hear anybody trying to get in."

Hawke nodded, and Swayne turned to Baxter.

"I'd like to take Miss Neish home with me now, Inspector, if you don't mind. My sister can look after her till all this has blown over, and, of course, we'll both be available any time you may need us."

Baxter signified his agreement. When Swayne had gone, the inspector started to put on his overcoat.

"That's another case settled, Hawke," he said, "and it's time I had my breakfast. By the way, those prints of yours came out very well, and will certainly put Grainger where he belongs—in the dock."

"I doubt it, Baxter," returned Hawke. "If I were a betting man, I'd lay you an even tanner that those prints are not Grainger's."

The Yard man showed his astonishment.

"No?" he snapped. "In that case, maybe you can tell me whose they are and where I can get a sample to prove it?"

"Yes, I can, Baxter." Hawke pointed to the glossy dust jacket of the detective novel. "He must have left quite a good set on that."

"What, you mean Swayne?" Baxter snorted angrily. "Don't be crazy, man! Bray was alive and well when Swayne left here. Jenkins can prove it."

"He can't, you know, Baxter. I've had a long chat with Jenkins.

The clue of the empty coal scuttle

He certainly thought he heard his master speak, but at the time he was only halfway across the hall.

"Jenkins was also under the impression that Bray was sitting in his chair smoking, but he admits that all he saw was the tip of his master's head and the cigar in his left hand. His left hand—note that, Baxter."

"What of it?" growled the inspector. He pointed to the ash on the rug. "This ash proves that he did hold the cigar in his left hand."

"Then how about this?" said Hawke, indicating the ashtray on the small table. "Here is a large ashtray, ready to his right hand, yet it has never been used. There's only a spot of ash there. Where is the rest of it, and, for that matter, where is the stub of the cigar?"

"He probably threw it in the fire, Hawke. Why shouldn't he do so, and the ash as well?"

"On the other hand," said the detective, "why should he? It would mean rising every now and then from his chair, a tiresome business when a man's enjoying a book and downright silly when there's an ashtray ready to hand."

"Are you trying to tell me that Bray was dead before Swayne left?"

"That is my opinion."

"Is it, though?" remarked Baxter somewhat sarcastically. "What about the doctor's opinion that Bray died some time after midnight? What have you to say to that?"

Hawke shrugged.

"Just this, Baxter."

He pointed to a large coal scuttle by the grate and went on:

"Jenkins filled that to the brim last night, and he was surprised to find it empty this morning. Bray must have used an excessive amount of coal. Yet this room is small and easily heated. The night was not cold, and, what's more, the household is short of coal. Why the apparent waste?"

"You tell me, Hawke, I'm not good at guessing."

"All right, Baxter. I suggest that the room was deliberately overheated in order to confuse the doctor as to the time of death. I believe that Swayne killed Bray almost as soon as Jenkins had left the room, then set about staging a scene for the butler's benefit."

"Go on," said the inspector.

"Swayne is a regular visitor here, almost one of the family, and he usually comes and goes as he pleases, so that Jenkins was surprised when his bell sounded last night. Swayne was preparing quite a clever alibi, you see."

"I believe that he lit a cigar, which he then wedged between the dead man's fingers before ringing the bell. When Jenkins came, Swayne was careful not to let him approach too near to the study. He imitated Bray's voice to convey the supposed message to the butler, allowed Jenkins a brief glance into the study, then shut the door before he got too near."

"And then what happened?" asked Baxter, interested in spite of himself. "Jenkins can tell us whether Swayne drove away or not."

The Corpse Smoked Cigars

"I'm afraid he can't do that. Jenkins, having let Swayne out at the back door, simply locked up and went to bed. He could not say positively that he heard Swayne's car, but that is not surprising. There is a lot of traffic on that road out there, and the butler had no reason at all to be suspicious of what was going on.

"Swayne, knowing that the butler would not go near the study again, came round from the back and let himself in by the window, which, no doubt, he had already unfastened. He had to get rid of that cigar, you see. Having done so, he set the stage to look like a break-in, went back to his car and drove off, confident that Grainger would be the only suspect."

Hawke paused and nodded towards the window.

"There's a concrete path from the back door right round to this window, Baxter," he went on. "The path was mended recently, and there's still some loose cement lying about. There's dry cement in those prints on the surround, and that fact seemed to indicate that, whoever came in, did so before the rain came on.

"Had Grainger come from the front door, as you thought, he'd have had to walk over a lawn and a fairly wide flower bed in pouring rain. He couldn't have escaped leaving some traces of mud in here."

"So that's what put you on to Swayne?"

"No, Baxter! I had my suspicions even before then; the prints will only confirm them." He

picked up the novel. "This is what gave the game away. We were asked to believe that Bray had been deep in this book from a quarter to eleven until well after midnight.

"Have a look at it, Baxter. The print is large and easily read, yet Bray apparently only got as far as page sixteen."

Hawke opened the book, and the inspector saw that pages sixteen and eighteen were joined together and would require cutting before it would be possible to continue reading. Baxter was now convinced.

"It's a darned good job you came, Hawke," he conceded. "I'll have those prints compared right away, but I've no doubt at all that they will be Swayne's. I don't know what the motive is, but we'll find that out in time. The main thing now is to have him arrested in case he tries to make a bolt for it."

* * * *

The prints on the book were found to be identical with those on the window sash, and Hubert Swayne was later arrested. Confronted with the accumulation of evidence Hawke had built up, the man broke down and confessed. He had been swindling his partner for years, and Bray was beginning to ask awkward questions.

By framing Grainger for the murder, and thus getting rid of him, Swayne hoped to marry Miss Neish himself, knowing that she would get all her uncle's money. He also admitted that he had studied medicine before going into business.

THE HOAX OF *The* PRICELESS PEARLS



Strange Travelling Companion

THE south-bound Scottish express rocked and swayed over the stretch between York and Doncaster. The two men making their way back to their compartment from the dining-car were thrown violently from side to side.

The taller of the pair, stoop-shouldered, soberly clad, wearing spectacles, was in advance. Upon

him fell the duty of opening and holding the doors between the coaches for his more sporting-looking companion.

The dining-car was right at the rear of the train, and they had to pass through the two luggage-vans. Here the swaying and jolting was even more alarming. Stacked mailbags had fallen across the floor. The two passengers had to step over these.

The Hoax of the Priceless Pearls

The guard was nowhere to be seen. The taller man pointed to some sacks of registered mail on a rack, and shouted above the roar of the train.

"No wonder there are mail robberies! Anyone could lift one of those."

They passed on, steadying themselves with an occasional grip on the racks, and the short, thickset traveller in tweeds found a chance to yell back—

"This was the train that was robbed the other day, wasn't it?"

His companion nodded as they emerged again into the corridor, bumping their elbows as they continued their long trek back to the second coach from the rear.

Here they entered a first-class compartment, where their light baggage and coats bore witness to where they had originally been seated. They had been unacquainted when they had boarded the train at Edinburgh, but, finding themselves together, they had soon entered into conversation, and had later chosen the same last sitting at lunch.

"That really is disgraceful!" said the bespectacled man as he seated himself in his corner. "It is encouraging people to rob mails if they are left lying about unattended. You'd have thought that after last week's robbery they would have taken more precautions."

"Yes, I thought it was this train. Read about it in the papers," grunted his companion, who had given the name of Gifford. "It was registered mail, wasn't it?"

"Yes, and whoever was concerned got a good haul."

"But how did they get away with the stuff?" asked Gifford, taking a cigar from his case. "I didn't read the details."

"Threw the bag out of a window to an accomplice waiting with a car presumably." The bespectacled traveller was very precise in his speech. "It needed excellent timing and preparation, but I doubt if the thieves expected to get such a good haul as they did get."

Gifford raised his eyebrows inquiringly, and crossed one leg over the other. His companion also settled himself comfortably on the seat, then continued—

"There was about £500 worth of mixed registered mail in that bag, but in addition there was a pearl necklace belonging to the Marchioness of Milsborough. It had been to some jewellers in London for restringing and the replacement of one pearl, and someone very stupidly sent it by registered post. However, the thieves could not have known it was in the bag that day. That was pure luck for them. Valued at £20,000, it was."

"Phe-ew!" Gifford sat bolt upright and all but dropped the cigar he was in the process of lighting. "That's a dickens of a lot of money. Are you sure? Was that in the papers?"

"No, but—" The man with the spectacles lowered his voice and glanced towards the corridor to see if anyone else was within hearing. "This is confidential. I represent the insurance company that covered those pearls, and I'm on my way down to London to settle the matter with the jewellers."

Inside information from a bogus insurance agent

"I'm afraid we shall have to pay out the £20,000 if it is not recovered. But, to my mind, they were at fault in sending such a valuable piece of jewellery by mail."

Gifford nodded and bit hard on his cigar. He seemed lost in thought as he studied the man opposite him, then he smiled.

"I wondered how you knew so much about the affair. I was beginning to be suspicious!"

His companion did not smile. Instead he handed over a card which labelled him as Arthur T. Gosling, representative of the Universal Insurance Company. After that he dozed in the corner.

Gifford did not sleep. There was a scowl on his face as he stared moodily out of the window.

King's Cross was reached at last, and they shared the same porter for their bags. As they passed through the barrier a well-built youth in a light raincoat caught the eye of the bespectacled traveller.

Dixon Hawke, for such it was, nodded slightly towards Gifford, then passed on without a further sign of recognition. They queued for a taxi, and Hawke asked Gifford:

"Can I share my cab with you? I'm going Piccadilly way."

"Thanks, but I'm going in the opposite direction, I'm afraid. Good-bye. It's been nice meeting you. It made the journey pass very pleasantly. Good-bye!"

They parted each in a different cab, and when Dixon Hawke glanced back he saw his own car, with Tommy Burke at the wheel, moving after the other taxi.

The private detective leaned forward and gave his address in Dover Street. Long before they arrived there he had removed and pocketed the spectacles and had straightened his shoulders. His disguise, simple though it had been, had fully accomplished its purpose.

Hawke Arrives Too Late!

FIFTEEN minutes later Dixon Hawke was back in his own rooms, waiting patiently for the telephone to ring. He knew he could rely on Tommy Burke to tail Gifford wherever he went, and to report as soon as there was anything interesting.

Scotland Yard had made a special request to Hawke to help them in this mail robbery case. There had been five or six such robberies recently in different parts of the country, and the Yard believed them to be the work of one small gang. Suspicion had been pinned on the man called Gifford, who had undoubtedly been travelling on each of the trains which had been robbed. He was supposed to be a commercial traveller in silk goods, but the police believed this to be a blind.

Yet, in spite of all their efforts, the Yard had failed to collect sufficient evidence to secure Gifford's arrest. He seemed to be able to smell a policeman a mile off, and never put a foot wrong when a plain-clothes detective was about.

That was why Chief Detective-Inspector M'Phinney had asked Hawke to take a hand. The ace private detective had listened to all the evidence, and had agreed

The Hoax of the Priceless Pearls

to help on condition that he had a free rein.

Now he waited anxiously until the phone bell rang. The caller was Tommy Burke, and he reported—

"I followed him, Guv'nor, and he's gone into what looks like a private house in Polkington Crescent, Regent's Park. There's a plate outside saying, 'L. Myers, Antiques,' so perhaps it's not a private house after all.

"That's where he is. I can see the entrance from here, and he's not come out yet."

Hawke's gaze darted to the large-scale map on the wall beside the phone, and at once located Polkington Crescent.

"Did he go anywhere else first? No, went straight there. Right, I'll be over as soon as possible. Wait at the phone-box unless Gifford comes out. If he does, follow him, and phone back his movements to that box. Take the number of it. I'll wait there."

He rang off and raced into the street. There he hailed a cruising taxi, offering the man double fare if he could take him to the corner of Polkington Crescent without loss of time.

The crescent proved to be a turning off Albert Road. When he had paid off the driver and turned the corner Hawke saw Tommy Burke lighting a cigarette near the phone-box. Evidently Gifford had not yet emerged.

"No sign of him," murmured the youth, who had left the car out of sight in a nearby cul-de-sac. "He's been in there half an hour. Nobody else has gone in, either."

They walked slowly past the house, which was a detached residence surrounded by gnarled trees. The plate on the gate had not been cleaned for years, and it was a difficult task to read the name on it.

From what Hawke could see of the house through the trees, it seemed in equally bad condition, with dirty windows, a total lack of paint, and a general air of neglect. The upper windows had no curtains.

Leaving Tommy still on watch, Dixon Hawke strolled on until he encountered a policeman at the corner. It was a quiet spot, and if any of the few who passed noticed him they probably thought he was a stranger asking the way. But Hawke was showing his identity card and making himself known before asking for information about Number 19, the house occupied by L. Myers.

"Yes, we know about old Myers," said the constable, thrilled to be talking to the eminent detective. "He lives there alone with his antiques. Deals in them. He buys at sales and ships a lot of stuff abroad. Sometimes he has loads of junk delivered there. They say the place is like a museum inside, and it never gets dusted. He's a regular recluse and never mixes with anyone in the neighbourhood. Any trouble about him, sir?"

"I don't think so, but I'll let you know. I've got an old refectory table that I want to sell," murmured the detective, and walked away leaving the young constable mystified.

A nod to Tommy Burke to con-



As Hawke and McPhinney watched from a nearby table, the Customs official pushed his hat on to the back of his head—the secret signal that the wanted man had arrived.

tinue to remain nearby, and Hawke entered the short drive, making for the front door. He meant to make some excuse to see Myers, and he did not mind if he interrupted Gifford. During the short time at his rooms Hawke had so changed his appearance that he did not think his travelling companion from the Scottish express would recognise him.

The electric bell was modern enough and rang loudly when he pressed the button, but there was no response, no movement within the house. He rang again and plied the heavy knocker, but with the same lack of result. The sound echoed through the building, but that was all.

Frowning, Dixon Hawke stepped back and looked at the dirty windows, then walked round the side of the house. The pathway was over-grown with weeds. There was a tradesmen's entrance from the alley at the rear, and a well-worn track existed between this and the back door. But it was not this which interested Dixon Hawke. The back door was open about six inches.

He pushed it wider and looked into a disordered scullery. Beyond was a kitchen and a doorway to a passage running through the house. After a few moments' hesitation he went inside, sniffing the musty atmosphere with distaste. L. Myers was no lover of fresh air.

The scullery and the kitchen were barely furnished, but once beyond this even the corridors were stacked with antique furniture. There was scarcely room to pass.

Hawke called loudly as he ventured farther, but there was no answer by the time he reached the foot of the stairs. Doors opened to right and left from the hall, and it was when he glanced into a sombre room furnished as an office that he realised why L. Myers did not reply.

A shrivelled old man lay face down on the dingy carpet, with his claw-like hands outstretched. The desk chair had fallen over. Hawke reached the man's side in a couple of strides, and, kneeling down, saw that nothing could be done for him. His collar had burst open, and there were ugly bruises on his scrawny neck, but his appearance indicated that he had died from heart failure.

The House With the Strange Secret

HAWKE made no effort to move the old man, but rose to his feet to look about the room. On the floor near another chair lay the hat which he had seen Gifford wearing at King's Cross Station. The open back door explained the absence of Gifford.

The detective made a hurried survey of a cupboard in the back-ground, noted a large modern safe in a corner, and peeped into several other rooms. He moved nothing, but he did not fail to look at the open ledger which lay on the desk. Finally he went to the phone in the corner and rang up Scotland Yard.

"Chief Detective - Inspector M'Phinney, please. Yes, it's me, Mac—Hawke. I think I've got the proof that you wanted about Gifford, but unfortunately I've also got a corpse on my hands.

The dead man's house was packed with loot!

"Come as soon as you can to 19 Polkington Crescent, Regent's Park. I'll explain then. Better bring a doctor with you."

He went outside to summon Tommy Burke and found the young constable talking to him. Dixon Hawke called them both in.

"You can make sure that nothing here is touched before your Chief Inspector arrives," he told the startled policeman. "I'm going to look the house over."

This he did, so successfully that when Duncan M'Phinney finally arrived, with a police surgeon and two other assistants, Hawke was able to tell him:

"Myers was one of the biggest 'fences' in London. His antique business was merely a cover. The house is packed with loot, and I don't doubt that the safe is the same. This has been a regular clearing-house for stolen goods."

"Gifford apparently sold to Myers anything found in the registered packages taken during those train robberies. I expect you'll find the necklace belonging to the Marchioness of Milsborough in that safe."

M'Phinney's eyes sparkled. The unmasking of a "fence" was more important than the capture of a dozen crooks.

"Then you think that Gifford killed Myers?" he queried.

"The body was warm when I got here, so I presume he did, but I don't think he meant to kill him. You'll probably find that he no more than shook the old scoundrel by the throat, and that Myers died of heart failure."

"H'm, quarrelling over the price to be paid for some loot, I suppose! Maybe Gifford's carried out another robbery that hasn't been reported to us yet?"

"I don't think so. I'm almost certain they were quarrelling over the Marchioness of Milsborough's necklace. It was because of the necklace that Gifford rushed round here directly he reached London from Scotland. I did not know Myers existed then, but I did know Gifford would head for the man who had bought that necklace from him."

M'Phinney looked at him doubtfully.

"Oh, and how did you know that?"

"Because in the train I pretended to be the representative of the insurance firm that was handling the claim for the necklace. As you know, it was valued at £1500, but I told Gifford it was valued at £20,000. I did so deliberately, for I knew it would sow a seed of doubt in his mind and make him think his 'fence' had cheated him."

"He must have lost his nerve when Myers collapsed and died, and fled the house by the back entrance. I'll have all his haunts watched," declared M'Phinney.

"I doubt if that will be any good. Long before now he'll have discovered that he left his hat here, and he'll fear that will identify him. He won't dare to go to any of his old haunts."

"I suggest that you have the Channel ports watched, and I'll give a hand myself. The chances are he'll be disguised, but I think I'll be able to spot him."

The Hoax of the Priceless Pearl

"We'll have the airports watched as well," grunted M'Phinney, making for the phone.

"Don't trouble about that. Gifford was quite communicative over lunch, especially as I led the conversation into the right channels. I thought he might try to bolt one day, so I took the trouble to find out that he was scared of flying and was a bad sailor. This means he'll take the short sea route—Dover or Folkestone."

"You think of everything, don't you?" said the Yard man admiringly. "But his passport won't get him out if he's disguised."

"He'll use one in the name of L. R. Robins, and I've no doubt he'll make himself resemble as much as possible the photo on that passport."

"How on earth do you know that?"

"Because, amongst the list of things stolen in that registered mail there was a passport belonging to a Mr L. R. Robins, of Glasgow. You showed me the list yourself."

* * *

Word was sent to all ports to watch for anyone using the passport of L. R. Robins. Because it was the likeliest service to be used by the fugitive, Chief Inspector M'Phinney and Dixon Hawke motored down to Dover to watch the passengers arriving for the night boat to Calais.

It was raining hard, and everyone was muffled up against the elements as they came down the long, narrow hall where passports were examined.

The two detectives hunched over some papers at a side table, but under cover of this Hawke was

watching every man who approached the barrier.

Finally he grunted:

"There's your man—the stout man with the horn-rimmed spectacles and the small moustache—the one with the light-coloured bag. That's Gifford. Whatever he does in the way of disguise, he can't change the shape of his ears. I had time to study them on the train."

The man indicated reached the passport officer and passed over his open passport with an air of confidence. The officer took one look at the name, then pushed back his hat on his head, a signal that the name of L. R. Robins had turned up. Then he returned the document and allowed the passenger through the barrier.

Gifford drew a deep breath and stepped out vigorously, but he had gone only a dozen paces when the heavy hand of M'Phinney fell on his shoulder and he heard the words:

"All right, Gifford, come this way, and don't try to make a fuss."

* * *

As Dixon Hawke had expected, medical evidence later proved that Gifford was only indirectly responsible for the death of Myers, and the prison sentence he was given was not appreciably lengthened because of this. He resolutely refused to betray his accomplices in the mail robberies, but, from the point of view of Scotland Yard, the main feature of the case was the way Dixon Hawke had succeeded in unmasking one of London's leading fences.

That in itself was a triumph.



Suicide SOS

"WHERE that fellow went wrong," observed Dixon Hawke, "was in saying he was a bricklayer, and so trying to put us off the scent as regards his job. He should have remembered that bricklayers invariably develop a flattening of the thumb and first finger of the left hand, due to picking up so many bricks."

The ace private detective was

discussing a recent successful case with Inspector Bell, of K Division, in the latter's office at the police station. It was about half-past seven, and the Inspector was looking forward to being off duty at eight o'clock.

"Ah, well," he said, "they all make mistakes, Mr Hawke. If they didn't, you and I would be out of a job."

Dixon Hawke nodded.

The telephone on the Inspector's

The Corpse with the Wrong Hairstyle

desk interrupted shrilly, and Bell, with a sudden, dark foreboding, picked up the receiver. He spoke sharply into the instrument.

"Hullo! Yes, yes—eh, what's that?" The Inspector frowned. "Where did you say? Fourteen Canbury Gardens? Yes, I know them. Have you sent for a doctor? Right! Don't touch a single thing—leave everything just as it is. Yes, I'll be around at once."

He hung up, and turned to his companion with a sigh of resignation.

"Suicide—at Canbury Gardens, three or four streets away. Girl poisoned herself, apparently—that was her sister phoning. Care to come along?"

The Divisional Inspector reached for his hat, and moved towards the door. Dixon Hawke followed, and in the charge-room they paused a few moments while Bell gave some instructions to his duty sergeant. Then they left the police station together and strode briskly down the street.

"Any details?" inquired Hawke as they went.

"No," was the reply. "The girl on the phone sounded on the verge of hysterics—only natural, I suppose. Said something about finding her sister lying dead in the bedroom. We'll soon know all about it, anyhow."

Arriving at the house, the two detectives were admitted by a good-looking young woman with a sleek, brown head of hair, whose eyes were red as from much weeping. She seemed in a pitiful state of nerves, but in a few minutes the Inspector had set her more at her

ease, and was patiently extracting her story.

"My name is Rhoda Levison," she said, "and I share this flat with my sister, Grace. We were both getting ready to go out this evening, and I was dressing in the bedroom when Grace came in.

"She said she had a headache, and asked me to fetch some aspirin. I went to fetch them, and when I came back I found her lying—on the bed——"

At this point the girl broke down with a sob.

Bell touched her gently on the shoulder.

"Please," he urged, "you mustn't give way more than you can help. I know this is a terrible experience for you, but try to keep control of yourself, and you may be able to help us. Where is your sister now? You left her just as you found her?"

The girl nodded tearfully.

"Y—yes—in the bedroom. I just took one look at her, and something told me she was dead. I—I ran out of the house, and phoned to you from the end of the road."

Dixon Hawke put in quietly:

"You said something about suicide, I believe? What made you think——"

Rhoda Levison looked up and shuddered slightly.

"There—there was a glass of water on the table near her. It smelled strange, and I—I thought——"

She stopped suddenly with a catch in her breath.

"You've sent for a doctor?" asked the Inspector.

"Yes, as soon as I'd finished

The poisoned drink at a girl's bedside

telephoning to you. I rang up Dr Morrison. He ought to be here at any minute."

Dixon Hawke and the Inspector exchanged glances.

"Come on," said the latter quietly, "we'd better get busy." He turned to the girl. "Look here, Miss Levison, you needn't come with us if it will distress you. Just show us the room, and if we should want anything we'll call you. When the doctor comes, ask him to wait a bit, will you?"

She nodded.

"Th-thank you. Come this way."

She led the detectives to the bedroom, watched them disappear inside, and returned to the sitting-room.

Once in the bedroom, Bell looked around curiously. He followed Hawke across to where the body of a young woman lay sprawled on the bed. As they stared down at it, both men let out simultaneous gasps of surprise.

"By Jove!" muttered the Inspector. "Twins! She's exactly like her sister—bit of a job to tell them apart, I'll bet."

"Different hair styles, though," remarked Hawke laconically, and, bending over the dead girl, began to carry out a preliminary examination. After a few minutes he straightened up.

"Well?" asked the Inspector.

"Poison, all right—judging from the odour, and the colour of the pupils of the eye, I'd say some form of trimethyldehyde."

Bell indicated the glass on the table nearby.

"What about that?"

Hawke picked up the glass, and, as he did so, caught sight of a small object lying on the floor at the foot of the bed. He stooped to gain possession of it—it was a small phial, and he sniffed critically at both this and the glass.

"That's the stuff," he announced definitely. "You can distinguish the same smell between her lips—it's unmistakable. She must have put some of the poison from the phial into the glass while her sister was out of the room."

"Wonder why she did it?" Bell indicated a pinkish tinge on the dead girl's teeth. "What's that?"

"Toothpaste," was the reply. "She'd been cleaning her teeth a few moments before, most likely."

The Inspector nodded.

"I remember now—the two of them were going out this evening. Poison must have acted pretty swiftly, since she was dead when the other one got back here."

Dixon Hawke had picked up a small black handbag bearing in one corner the initials "G. L." He opened it, and examined the contents idly—two letters and a postcard addressed to Miss Grace Levison, a powder compact, a lipstick in a case, cambric handkerchief, manicure file, and a few silver and copper coins. There were also four aspirin tablets wrapped in a piece of paper, and one of these he tasted cautiously.

"Anything useful there?" asked Bell.

Hawke shook his head.

"Not really. We might ask the other girl a few questions now. She may be able to throw some light on the reason for her sister's action."

The Corpse with the Wrong Hairstyle

They went from the bedroom and found Rhoda Levison in the sitting-room with a tall, grey-haired man of professional demeanour, whom the Inspector recognised as Dr Morrison. Dixon Hawke was introduced, then Bell said:

"It's O K for you to make your own examination now, Doctor. While you're doing it, we'd like to talk to Miss Levison."

"Very good, Inspector," nodded Morrison, and went away towards the bedroom. Inspector Bell turned to the girl.

Money Trouble

"DO you feel up to answering one or two questions, Miss Levison? We shan't worry you more than we can help."

"Yes, of course. I'll do my best," she answered.

"Thank you. In the first place, then, can you offer any sort of explanation as to why your sister should have wanted to take her own life?"

Rhoda Levison hesitated.

"I—I really don't know. Unless it was Uncle George's will."

"Uncle George's will?" repeated Bell curiously. "You mean a relative of yours?"

"Yes. We had an uncle living in Shropshire. We used to visit him now and then, but not often. A week or two ago we had a letter from his lawyers telling us that he had died. They went on to say that he had left Grace, my sister, three hundred pounds a year, but to me he left £1500 a year and a little property."

Dixon Hawke's eyebrows rose.

"Rather an unequal share-out, wasn't it? Rough luck on your sister."

"Yes, that's what I thought," nodded Rhoda. "Grace was terribly upset, of course, when she realised that I'd been treated so much more generously than she had. She said she'd always known I was Uncle George's favourite, but he needn't have shown it so plainly."

"She said it wasn't fair, and at first she vowed she wouldn't take even the three hundred a year. But I talked her over, and promised to do something to make it up to her."

"I see." Bell rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "And since then?"

"Since then," went on the girl, "Grace has seemed very worried, and once she actually told me she was fed-up with life, and that no one ever treated her fairly. Her boy friend broke things off with her a little while ago, too. But not for one moment did I think she would have done—this."

There was a moment's silence before Bell put his next question.

"What exactly were the circumstances of what happened tonight?"

Rhoda pondered a moment.

"Th-there isn't very much to tell," she confessed. "We had supper at about six o'clock, and afterwards Grace went to the bath-room. I heard her splashing about in the bath for some time, then she came out and found me trying on a frock."

"As she came into the bedroom, she complained of a headache—she said she'd had it all day. She asked

"Then suddenly I realised she was dead!"

me to fetch her a couple of aspirins, so I came into this room to get them."

"And then?" prompted Bell.

"When I went back into the bedroom, I was horrified to see Grace lying across the bed. She looked so strange that I rushed up to her, then I saw at once something had happened. I shook her and spoke to her, but she didn't answer—then suddenly I realised she was dead!"

"There'll have to be an inquest," stated Inspector Bell, "and it will probably be rather painful for you. But I'm afraid it can't be helped. For the moment, however, we need not trouble you further. Ah, here comes the doctor."

Dr Morrison had emerged from the bedroom, and came across to where they stood.

"I suppose you just want me to confirm what you already know, gentlemen, since I understand Mr Hawke has himself taken a medical degree? Well, death was due to poison, apparently self-administered, though you'll have to satisfy yourselves on that point.

"I'd say she's been dead less than an hour—body temperature's scarcely changed. You'll most likely want a P.M., but I'll let you have a more detailed report first thing in the morning."

Having given his verbal report, the doctor made his departure.

"Well, Miss Levison," remarked Bell, "there are one or two things I'll have to take along with me, so I'll fetch them now, then we can leave you in peace."

He went back to the bedroom.

"By the way, that's the bathroom, isn't it?" queried the private detective.

As the girl nodded, Dixon Hawke walked across the passage and stepped inside the little room, giving a keen, comprehensive glance all round, noting that the bath had been used and emptied, and observing the wet towels and other signs of recent ablutions. On a shelf beneath a wall mirror stood a coloured bottle of talcum powder and one or two jars of face cream.

Hawke opened a white enamelled cabinet just above the porcelain wash-basin. Inside were some hair-grips, two bottles of wave-set and one of liquid shampoo, a half-used tube of toothpaste, and a large box of face powder.

He left the bathroom, and rejoined his official colleague in the passage.

Inspector Bell put the usual seal on the bedroom door, and, at Dixon Hawke's suggestion, on the door of the bathroom as well. Then, after a few further words of sympathy and reassurance to Rhoda Levison, the two detectives left the house.

Hawke Is Worried

THE following afternoon Dixon Hawke sat sprawled in his favourite armchair in the consulting-room at Dover Street. At the table his young assistant, Tommy Burke, was pasting newspaper cuttings in a large volume. The famous detective had sat in silence for over an hour with his eyes closed.

The ringing of the street door bell had the effect of jerking Dixon Hawke back from his ruminations

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whatever they were. He sat upright in his chair, and looked across at his assistant.

"Who the dickens is that?" he snapped irritably, as if annoyed that his train of thought had been broken into. "Better answer, Tommy, and, whoever it is, tell them I'm not available!"

"I'll soon send them packing," vowed Tommy.

Things did not turn out as Tommy expected, however. When he returned to the room he had Divisional-Inspector Bell hard at his heels.

"Sorry, Guv'nor, I couldn't help it," apologised the youth. "The Inspector wouldn't take 'no' for an answer, and didn't believe me when I told him you'd suddenly gone down with smallpox!"

Bell gave an indignant snort, and Dixon Hawke chuckled.

"Tommy, at times I despair of you. Make yourself at home, Bell. As a matter of fact, I was just thinking about you, and wondering how last night's affair had panned out. Everything satisfactory, eh?"

The inspector took a seat on the other side of the fireplace.

"If you mean we've established a case of suicide, yes, Mr Hawke. I happened to be passing, and I thought I'd just look in and tell you we'd tied up all the ends."

"That's fine. No complications, then?"

Bell glanced at him queerly.

"None at all. But what's up? You sound as if there might have been."

Hawke shook his head.

"No, not really." He paused an

instant, then went on. "All the same, I've got a queer feeling that something's escaped us—something we ought to have known, or did know but couldn't fit into its proper place. No," he went on, noting the puzzled frown on the inspector's face, "don't ask me what it is, because I couldn't tell you, and maybe I'm only imagining things."

"If you'll forgive my saying so, I reckon you must be," declared Bell. "We've been working on the case all day, and, as I say, we've got it all tied up. I had that glass Grace Levison drank from tested for finger-prints, and also the poison phial we found on the floor—her finger-prints were on them, and no others."

"The post-mortem shows that she'd swallowed a stiffish dose of the same sort of stuff, and she must have died within a minute or so. I've checked up on how she got hold of the poison, and it seems she had a B.Sc. degree, and worked in the research department of Associated Chemical Products, Ltd., where she was handling poisonous substances all day long."

"And the motive for her act?" Hawke thrummed gently on the arm of his chair. "You've established that, I suppose?"

Bell shrugged.

"From all we've been able to gather, Grace Levison was a morose sort of girl, one of the type that gets easily depressed. She'd fallen for one of the chaps at the place where she worked, and after stringing her along for a bit he let her down suddenly about a month ago."

The suicide frame-up was a cover for murder!

"Then this money business hit her badly—you can understand that, of course. It's all pretty clear."

Dixon Hawke stood up.

"Well, if you're satisfied, my hunch amounts to nothing. But I wish to goodness I could think what it is for all that."

Conversation turned to more general topics, and half an hour later Bell left Dover Street. But when he had gone Dixon Hawke once more relapsed into deep meditation, and Tommy Burke knew that for all the police official's assurance, his Guv'nor was not satisfied.

Suddenly, after almost another full hour's silence, the detective sprang to his feet with a loud exclamation.

"I've got it!" cried Dixon Hawke.

"Hi! What the merry dickens?" protested Tommy.

"I knew there was something—I knew it. Why on earth didn't it come to me sooner?" His lean features were alight with excitement, and he moved across to where the telephone stood on his desk. Then he pulled up, and some of the light died out of his eyes, to be replaced by a puzzled expression. "Yet, why?" he murmured to himself. "There must have been some purpose, otherwise it doesn't make sense."

He thrust his hands into his pockets and began pacing the floor restlessly. He continued this perambulation for several minutes, his brows creased in a thoughtful frown. Then he stopped in his tracks and drew a deep breath.

"Tommy," he said tensely, "nip

round and fetch the car. We're going to pay a call on Associated Chemical Products, Ltd."

Traitor Toothbrush

ALMOST twenty-four hours after their first visit, Divisional-Inspector Bell and Dixon Hawke stood once more on the doorstep of No. 14 Canbury Gardens. This time Tommy Burke was with them, having driven them there.

As before, it was Rhoda Levison who admitted them to the house and took them along to the sitting-room where they had first interviewed her. She was looking pale and strained.

Bell's face was unusually grave.

"Sit down, Miss Levison," he invited, and waited until she had done so.

She looked at him.

"Is there something else you wish to know?"

"Miss Levison," said Bell slowly and severely, "why did you kill your sister?"

The girl's hand flew to her throat.

"Oh, I—I——"

"You are not Rhoda Levison, are you? You are Grace—it was Rhoda who—er—died."

"Y-you're mad! You—you don't know what you're saying. I didn't——"

The Inspector held up a hand.

"I should advise you not to make any statement whatever. It is my painful duty to have to arrest you on a charge of having caused the death of Rhoda Levison"

The girl remained sitting there,

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stunned and speechless. It was Dixon Hawke who spoke next.

"When first we came here," he said, "you told us that you left the bedroom to fetch some aspirin for your sister. In a handbag bearing the initials G. L. were four tablets of aspirin. I couldn't help wondering why, believing that it was Grace who had died, she should have asked you to get her some, when she must have known there was aspirin right to hand in her bag. However, I assumed she may have forgotten that, therefore I did not attach much importance to it.

"But after leaving here last evening something kept nagging away in my brain. I felt that there was some factor I had overlooked, or the significance of which I had failed to understand at the time. Not until a few hours ago did I realise what that was."

Hawke paused a moment.

"There were clear indications," he went on, "of your sister having just cleaned her teeth. Yet neither in the bathroom nor in the bedroom was any toothbrush to be found! The one she used had obviously been removed, the reason being that it held some incriminating evidence. And the only one who could have removed it—who would have had any reason to remove it—was yourself.

"The moment this fact dawned upon me I wondered what motive there could possibly be for you wishing to murder your sister. It could not have been for her money, since you were the one who benefited most from your uncle's legacy. And then I asked myself—supposing

things had been the other way about? Once launched on this train of thought, deductions followed swiftly enough.

"You were twins, and both of you looked identical, it was almost impossible to distinguish between you—excepting for your hair styles. Your hair is straight and sleek—that of the dead girl was wavy.

"I went along to Associated Chemical Products and had a few words with the man to whom Grace Levison had been engaged. He told me that she had straight hair—that Rhoda's was wavy. After that, everything fitted into place.

"Your knowledge of chemistry and your opportunity of getting hold of poisonous drugs at the place where you worked, gave you the idea of doctoring a tube of toothpaste. No doubt, you removed any already in the bathroom to make sure your sister used the fatal one. Then, when she was dead, you disposed of the poisoned tube, putting back the harmless one.

"You had with you a small phial of the same poison, and this you dropped near your sister's body, having previously put some into a glass of water. This glass and the phial you carefully wiped so as to remove your own finger-prints, then, holding them with a handkerchief or something, you impressed your sister's prints upon them.

"It was a diabolically clever scheme, and it would almost certainly have succeeded—if only you'd remembered, when you threw away the toothbrush containing the poisoned toothpaste to replace it with another one, suitably wet."

The ATOM TRAIN MYSTERY



An "Impossible" Crime!

WHEN Dixon Hawke received an official letter from Detective-Inspector Baxter, chief of the Flying Squad, asking him to call at New Scotland Yard, he guessed that there must be something big in the wind. The private detective was frequently called upon semi-officially to assist the police in cases where his unrivalled experience and ability could bring a fresh mind to a problem, or where a private investigator had advantages over the official authorities. It was, however, not very usual for him to receive a formal request to visit the Yard.

It became evident as soon as

Hawke found himself shown, not into Baxter's room, which he knew quite well, but into that of the Assistant Commissioner, that this was indeed a matter of some importance. The A.C. was sitting at his desk and Baxter standing by it when Dixon Hawke entered. The Commissioner rose and extended his hand, saying—

"Good-morning, Hawke! I am glad you were able to come. Take a seat. You, too, Baxter."

Although his greeting was pleasant Hawke's penetrative mind realised at once that the A.C. was a very worried man, and the burly Baxter, too, was not his usual cheery self.

The A.C. continued—

"We want your help, Hawke, on

The Atom Train Mystery

a very serious matter which concerns the latest scientific plans of the nation."

"Something to do with atomic energy, I suppose?" queried the private detective.

"Yes," replied the Commissioner, then, turning to the inspector, he said, "I think you'd better tell the story, Baxter, and say what we've done so far."

The inspector immediately took up the tale.

"Well, Hawke, as you know, there are two atomic energy plants in this country—one at Sellafield, in Cumberland, and the other at Harwell, in Berkshire. It is sometimes necessary to send some of the activated uranium produced from the atomic pile at Sellafield down to Harwell for testing in the laboratories there.

"In fact, a waggon load goes down each week. The waggon is sealed, of course, and it is taken by special train from Sellafield to Preston, where it is attached to a fast freight train leaving at 8 p.m. non-stop to Willesden marshalling yards."

"Definitely non-stop?" queried Hawke.

"Yes, there may be a momentary halt for signals, but special efforts are made to give this train a clear run. It is due at Willesden at 2 a.m. As soon as the trucks in front have been taken off, a special engine backs down to the sealed waggon and takes it direct to the unloading point inside the enclosed area at Harwell."

The Assistant Commissioner interrupted—

"Now, this is where the fantastic thing happens, Hawke. When the sealed truck is opened, some of the stuff is missing!"

"Sounds like magic," smiled the Dover Street man.

"There is no time for jokes, Hawke," snapped Baxter.

The inspector, whose temper was none too good at the best of times, was obviously very much on edge.

"I just can't imagine how it happens," he went on. "We open the truck, the seal obviously not having been tampered with, and we find the contents disarranged and some missing! I should explain, by the way, that this radio-active material is packed in lead-lined boxes about the size of two house bricks placed end to end.

"Several times there are two or three, sometimes four, missing out of a consignment of anything from fifty to two hundred. When the truck is standing at Willesden, a railway police constable is placed to watch but there is no sign of any attempt to enter the truck. Anyway, the seals are untouched when they arrive at Harwell."

"Can a man carry these boxes easily?" asked Hawke.

"Oh, yes," replied Baxter. "They are heavy enough, but a man could easily carry one or two."

"I think I'd better do a trip by this train," announced the private detective, "and get a complete idea of the whole operation. I suppose you can trust all the men who handle the stuff?"

"Yes, of course," put in the Commissioner. "We have been making trebly sure of everyone who is

A waggonload of mystery has the Yard at a loss

allowed to go near Harwell or Sellafield."

Hawke looked at his watch.

"There's time to catch the Mid-day Scot from Euston as far as Preston."

"Right," said the A.C., rising from his chair. "Baxter here can go with you. If you can solve this problem, we shall be very grateful. If these boxes continue to disappear there will be many unpleasant questions asked in Parliament and the Press, and, of course, the possible international dangers and repercussions are obvious. We'll have a car to meet you at Preston."

"I'll see you at Euston in an hour's time," the private detective said to Baxter. "I'll call in at my flat in Dover Street and bring Tommy Burke along. He may come in useful."

Hawke Takes a Trip

SOME seventy minutes later the trio were sitting in a specially-reserved first-class compartment as the express picked up speed past Camden sidings, and the chief of the Flying Squad continued his explanation of the situation.

"It seems just incredible," he said. "No one enters the waggon, yet, by the end of the journey, several of the packages have gone."

He heaved a sigh of despair.

"I'd like to have a look at this waggon before it is loaded tonight," said Hawke.

"O K," agreed Baxter. "But I warn you it is as solid as the Chief sometimes says my head must be."

Inspector Baxter and his two companions had a meal on the train and, when the police car met them at Preston, they drove straight to Sellafield, an hour and a half's run up the winding moorland roads. The grey Lake District mountains provided a sombre background for the weird constructions of the atomic energy plant.

At the gate they were stopped by the constable on duty. Baxter produced his pass and the special letter of authority from the Assistant Commissioner allowing Dixon Hawke and Tommy Burke to enter.

"This is Mr Hawke and his assistant," explained the inspector.

Once inside, they were met by the foreman supervising the loading of the waggon.

"I'd like to inspect the waggon before it is loaded," declared Dixon Hawke.

They went over to the sidings, where stood an engine, a four-wheeled standard box waggon, and a guard's van. Hawke and Baxter walked round the waggon, which seemed normal enough. They then went inside and sounded the boards.

"Firm enough, eh?" queried Baxter, then added sarcastically. "You don't think the boxes fall through the cracks in the floorboards, do you?"

"It certainly feels strong enough," agreed Hawke. "I'll just have a look underneath the waggon, though."

Tommy Burke and the inspector watched as Hawke crawled under the waggon and after a few moments, appeared again.

"Well, we're ready to load up now," he announced.

The Atom Train Mystery

They watched closely as two hundred leaden boxes were carefully loaded and counted.

"This is where we make our trip in the guard's van," declared Dixon Hawke when the doors of the truck were carefully bolted, locked and sealed. "I'd like you to send a wire off to the Yard before we go, Baxter. Arrange for a squad of men to be at Willesden yards by the time the train is due, but have them kept out of sight."

The inspector agreed to the request and went off to make the necessary telephone call to Preston Police Station to have the message sent to Scotland Yard.

"Are you sure there won't be any trouble on the way, Guv'nor?" asked Tommy.

"I don't think so," said Hawke, "if there are no stops, but we'll travel with the guard just in case."

As soon as Baxter came back, the three detectives clambered aboard and the special train moved off. Soon they were sharing a cup of tea which the guard had brewed up on his little stove.

"I think I know how the stuff disappears," Hawke said. "The question is, where? What steps do you take to check the railwaymen, Baxter?"

"Well," replied the inspector, "the guard here is always on this job, and is cleared under the security regulations. So are the driver and fireman of this engine, because everyone who enters the gates of Sellafield has to be. The train from Preston, however, is just an ordinary fast freight. We don't want to

advertise too widely what the cargo of these trucks is."

They reached Preston at five to eight without incident. Here the trucks and the guard's van were uncoupled from the small engine which had brought them down from Sellafield and shunted on to the rear of the waiting express goods. Immediately they were coupled up, the big, powerful loco. moved off and quickly gathered speed. They were soon rattling at a steady 45 m.p.h. past the slag heaps and cotton mills of Lancashire, now gradually disappearing in the gathering gloom of the evening.

"I want you to go out on the platform of this van and keep a constant lookout, Tommy," said Hawke to his assistant. "It'll be a bit windy, but the fresh air will do you good."

Tommy grinned.

"Not so comfortable as coming up on the Scot, eh, Guv'nor?"

"You think the train might be held up, do you, Hawke?" queried Baxter.

"Not actually held up, but it's possible that the disappearing trick might be worked at a bogus signal halt, or even when we are travelling very slow, through Crewe yards, perhaps. But I am pretty certain it will happen at Willesden."

The guard interrupted.

"We've never had a stop except for about half a minute sometimes at Crewe. We have to go slow for about ten minutes near Polesworth, because of the mine workings underneath the line."

"That doesn't seem to provide much opportunity for anything to



Surrounded by the police squad Baxter had summoned, the detectives watched intently for any attempt to break into the waggon as it stood in the marshalling yard.

The Atom Train Mystery

happen," said Hawke. "How long is the halt at Willesden?"

"Oh, about twenty minutes to half an hour," replied the guard. "But I keep a constant lookout, and I've never seen anyone try to enter the truck."

This particular trip turned out to be smoother even than usual. Not a single signal check was met with, and the slow-down at Polesworth was only to about 15 m.p.h. There was not the slightest sign of anything abnormal anywhere along the line. When the train finally clanked to a halt in the Willesden marshalling yard, Detective-Inspector Baxter yawned and said:

"Well, looks as though Tommy has kept his vigil for nothing tonight."

"What happens now?" asked Hawke.

"A shunting engine takes off the trucks in front and, when that has been done, a special Western Region locomotive backs down and takes the waggon and the guard's van to Harwell, again non-stop, until the gates of the plant have closed safely behind them."

"And the wait here is about half an hour?" put in Tommy Burke.

"Yes," agreed Baxter. "About that."

"Well," said Dixon Hawke, "we'll just move away about fifty yards from the truck and wait."

The three detectives were soon hidden in the shadow of some other trucks where the rays from the huge arc lights which illuminated the yards hardly penetrated. The special train, however, was clearly lit, and a British Railways police-

man was walking slowly alongside it.

Hawke whispered to Baxter:

"I'm going for a ride on the footplate. Since there's not room for more than one there besides the driver and fireman, I want you and Tommy to go by car as fast as you can to Harwell, and be there by the time the train arrives, with a squad of men."

"What about the men I've had here," began Baxter angrily. "Are they not wanted?"

"Not now," said Dixon Hawke. "I'll explain later when I see you at Harwell. The train will be off in a minute, so I'll have to go. It's essential that I do this trip alone."

Caught In the Act!

THE detective then walked off rapidly, keeping carefully to the shadows until he placed the engine between himself and the guard's van. He just managed to reach the footplate by the time the signal glowed green for the goods train's departure. The engine crew knew the police were about, and they therefore were not unduly surprised when Dixon Hawke suddenly emerged from the darkness and indicated that he was going to ride with them.

"You'll get that suit dirty, chum," grinned the driver as he opened the regulator handle and the special moved off.

The fireman was too busily engaged in shovelling coal, in order to get a good head of steam, to take much notice. Hawke thought for a moment that here was a job which really did need toil and sweat, and that the private investigation busi-

Hawke's train-top trip to tackle a crook!

ness was not such hard work after all!

However, there was no time to lose and, as soon as the train was out of the yard, Hawke, to the amazement of the driver and fireman, climbed up on the tender and crawled to the edge of the sealed van. Shrugging their shoulders, the engine crew concentrated on their job of keeping the special strictly to time at all costs. They therefore carried on as normal, working up increased speed as the train wended its way through the now almost silent suburbs of London, the darkness occasionally pierced by the glare from some factory on night shift.

The detective gradually crawled along the top of the van. The job was slow and somewhat painful as he grazed his shins on the steel roof, but the noise he unavoidably made was drowned by the rattling of the trucks.

Working himself gradually forward and keeping as low as possible, he at last came upon the sight he had hoped would be the reward of his dangerous climb.

The guard was leaning over the handrail of the open platform at the front of his van and calmly unscrewing the screws which held the ventilator, a metal plate about eighteen inches square, with four louvred bars, to the boards of the end wall of the van in front of him. He was so engrossed in his task that he did not once look up.

When the plate was off, he carefully put it down on the floor of his van and reached for a six-foot pair of tongs of the sort used by boiler-men for picking out clinker from the

back of a furnace. With this he lifted four of the precious boxes from inside the truck. He then dislodged as many as possible of the remaining boxes, so that it was not obvious that the four boxes had been removed from the top. Next, he carefully screwed back the ventilator plate and turned to enter his cabin.

Hawke acted. He swung himself down on to the platform, but the guard had heard him and, recovering from his astonishment, leapt at Dixon Hawke before the Dover Street detective had gained a firm foothold and was still unbalanced. In that first instant the guard almost tripped Hawke backwards over the handrail, but the detective, pulling back his knees, let fly with both feet in his attacker's stomach.

The guard reeled back and struck his head against the side of his cabin. For a moment Hawke was pivoted perilously with the middle of his back on the handrail, but he managed to regain his balance on the right side. The guard, however, was clean out. When he did come to, he was so shaken that he speedily made a full confession.

A short time later, the train steamed into the special station inside the high wire fence which surrounds the Harwell atomic energy plant, and Inspector Baxter and Tommy were waiting with a squad of police.

"What on earth have you been doing to your suit, Guv'nor?" asked Tommy, gazing in amazement at Hawke's dishevelled appearance.

"This is your man, Baxter," said the detective, and handed over the now completely cowed foreign agent.

The Atom Train Mystery

* * * *

When the three detectives were in a police car on the way home, Dixon Hawke took out his pipe, filled it carefully with his favourite mixture, lit it, took two or three slow puffs, and continued with his explanation.

"The trouble with this case was that it was one of those where you can make a pretty shrewd guess at the criminal but there's no way of convicting, except by catching him red-handed."

"Don't I know it!" growled Baxter. "I had thought about the guard, but I couldn't quite see how he could do it. What clue put you on to him?"

"Well, there weren't any, really. It would have helped if the screws holding the ventilator had borne slight marks, indicating the application of a screwdriver to them to show they had been tampered with. In fact, they did, but your own security regulations, Baxter, which involved a daily tightening up of every screw and bolt on the vans, meant that they were all marked.

"Yet, although it was clear that the truck was solid enough, there was no false bottom, or anything of that sort, and, therefore, through the ventilator was the only way out, I realised that unless you caught the man in the act, any prosecution would only have brought you some caustic criticism from the magistrate, as long as the guard kept his mouth shut."

Tommy burst out indignantly:

"Well, what was the idea of making me spend all the journey from Preston to Willesden on that

open platform looking for non-existent spies? I might have caught my death of cold!"

"Yes," put in Baxter, "and all that business of peering underneath the truck at Sellafeld, and arranging for a squad of men at Willesden."

Hawke laughed.

"I deliberately made all those 'arrangements' in the hearing of the guard in order to convince him that I was completely off the track. That is why, too, I had to travel alone on the journey to Harwell. It was because he thought I was safely at Willesden looking for spies that he made his attempt. Actually any ten minutes of straight run is long enough for the job. Then he simply threw the boxes into the long grass at the side of the line at a prearranged spot, and his accomplices picked them up at their leisure."

It was now 5 a.m. as the patrol car swept past the still deserted Marble Arch and along Oxford Street, before making for Dover Street and depositing Dixon Hawke and Tommy at the entrance to their flat.

"And the guard was cleared by the security people, too," mused Baxter.

"Isn't that just the trouble with these fifth columnists?" rejoined the private detective. "If they declared their intentions it would be easy for us. After all, Fuchs was thought to be O K, too. Anyway I'm glad for my own safety that no more of that atomic stuff is getting into the wrong hands. Now you've got the key man, he should lead you to the rest of the gang before too much harm is done. Good-night."

The KNIFE FROM NOWHERE!



Mystery Murder

VERONICA MASON shivered as she drew her evening wrap closer round her shoulders. It was pleasantly warm in the hall of her luxurious West End house, yet its comfort failed to give her any pleasure.

The eyes which looked up the carpeted staircase were filled with anxiety. As she stood at the bottom of the stairs the light from a tall window on the first landing shone full upon her face—a pretty face which showed traces of suffering.

Already it was almost eight o'clock and it did not do to be late at an official reception. As she waited

there, however, it was not only her husband's tardiness which worried her. She held her breath as she heard a door close noisily upstairs.

"Please hurry, Hugo," she called, "it's eight already."

A thick chuckle answered her, followed by a falsetto rendering of the latest popular dance tune. Mrs. Mason bit her lip hard, and looked up to confirm her fears. As her husband descended towards the landing she could see him quite clearly over the waist-high balustrade.

The Knife from Nowhere!

In full evening kit, complete with opera hat and ebony cane, he still made a fine figure. She had not eyes for this, though. The twirling cane, the song, and the rare good humour confirmed her suspicion that Hugo had been drinking.

As if to bear her out, at the turn of the staircase he ceased his ditty on a squawk, leaned over the balustrade, and slid ungracefully down the last flight. As he rolled off at the bottom she averted her eyes, unwilling to watch his clumsy recovery, and steeling herself to withstand the change of mood that the incident would doubtless bring about.

There was utter silence in the hall. In a moment Veronica turned, and it was then that she saw the blood streaming over his starched collar and seeping into the deep, grey pile of the carpet. It came from a wound in the side of his neck just below the right ear, from which protruded the handle of a long stiletto.

The girl opened her mouth to scream, then her eyes widened with a still greater terror. In a kind of strangled gasp she called: "Tony—"

* * *

Chief Detective-Inspector Duncan M'Phinney was clearing his desk for the night when the phone rang. He picked up the receiver with a gesture of resignation towards Dixon Hawke, with whom he had been about to spend an evening of recreation. The famous private detective pricked up his ears, for a call to M'Phinney outside official hours usually meant a more exciting

prospect than their supper-and-theatre programme.

"Right, put him through," said M'Phinney. He punctuated the recital from the other end by an occasional non-committal grunt, and ended by promising to go along at once.

"You'd better come, too, Hawke," went on the Yard man, and his companion nodded agreement.

Picking up the phone, Hawke contacted his youthful assistant, Tommy Burke, who did not readily forgive being overlooked on such an occasion, especially when, according to M'Phinney, it was a case of sudden death.

Before leaving Scotland Yard, M'Phinney dug out some information from his colleagues about the residents at 9 Westcliffe Gardens, the address for which the detectives were making.

The dead man, Hugo Mason, was head of a big firm of importers. The business was a long-standing one, and had been brought to a peak of efficiency by his father. Hugo, however, apparently concerned himself with little except squandering the profits of the business. He had married a debutante some years younger than himself, and rumour had it that the marriage was not a happy one.

Thus primed, the detectives set out, and were soon ringing the bell at No. 9. The door was opened by a dark, foreign-looking man, who explained that it was the maid's night off. M'Phinney eyed him keenly.

"It was you who rang the Yard?" he asked.

The silken clue on an ebony cane

The young man nodded.

"That is so. Within a few minutes of the—the occurrence. I am Tony Veraccio, Mr Mason's private secretary. Mrs Mason is in the morning-room, and will see you there whenever you are ready."

At M'Phinney's request Veraccio also adjourned to the morning-room, and the detectives crossed the hall to the bottom of the stairs, where the police doctor was already examining the dead man.

"He's been dead a little less than an hour," was the latter's report.

Hawke knelt down and tried to raise the right arm of the corpse. It was quite rigid.

"I thought rigor did not set in for several hours, Doctor?" he remarked.

"That is so, Mr Hawke," nodded the doctor. "The present rigidity can only be due to a cadaveric spasm. That is to say, a sudden shock at the instant prior to death had tensed certain muscles, which then remain stiff until rigor mortis passes off."

"Of course, if he caught sight of his attacker throwing the weapon, that would account for it, would it not?" suggested M'Phinney.

It was the doctor's opinion that this would provide the correct timing of the shock. He added that suicide was, in any event, unlikely, as it would be difficult, if not impossible, to get sufficient purchase on the weapon at that angle.

Having completed his report, the doctor departed, leaving the fingerprint specialists in possession. Hawke still knelt by the body, noting small details which might be useful later.

The dead man still grasped the ebony cane in his stiff right hand. Suddenly the detective reached towards its ferrule and detached something. It was a thread of dark blue silk, caught on the roughened edge of the metal.

"Might have been there long enough, of course," he muttered, "but you never know."

"Can I chase it up, Guv'nor?"

Hawke turned as the familiar voice of his assistant sounded at his ear.

"So you've arrived, young 'un," he remarked. "Yes, it's an idea. Take this thread and see if you can trace its origin in the house. The cane has recently been polished, so it is likely he picked up this thread on his way from his bedroom this evening."

Tommy went away to make his search, and Hawke joined M'Phinney who had been giving directions to his men.

Together they proceeded to the morning-room. Mrs Mason sat on a couch opposite the door, twisting her handkerchief in her fingers. She was obviously labouring under great strain, and her eyes kept going involuntarily towards Tony Veraccio, who stood by the centre table.

The secretary, too, looked nervous, but in his demeanour was something like anger. The atmosphere was tense, almost as if a quarrel had been interrupted. All this was noted by the detectives, while M'Phinney gave Mrs Mason the customary condolences and apologies. She expressed herself willing to make a statement, and

The Knife from Nowhere!

described the scene as she saw it at the moment of her husband's death.

"You thought that when he slumped over the balustrade, he was sliding down for fun?" asked M'Phinney. "Was not that an unusual thing for him to do?"

She hesitated.

"My husband was inclined to be—rather exuberant when he had had a few drinks," she explained. "It would not have been a surprising thing for him to do."

"You were watching closely as he walked down to the landing. Now you saw no streak or flash that might have been the stiletto, if it were thrown from the top of the stairs?"

She shook her head.

"And you saw no one there besides himself?"

Again she shook her head emphatically.

"Inspector, I swear to you there was no one on the stair, nor on the upper landing as far as the balustrade runs. I must have seen them, had there been anyone."

Hawke had been covertly observing the secretary, and he noticed that at Mrs Mason's vehement denial, his lips tightened perceptibly. M'Phinney turned now to Veraccio.

"Will you tell us what you know of the matter?"

The Italian shrugged.

"I have little to help you, Inspector," he said. "I was working in the library upstairs when I heard Mr Mason pass the door, singing. It was perhaps two minutes later that I heard Mrs Mason call me."

In answer to further questions, he told them the library door was

on the right, just at the top of the stairs.

"Now, about the weapon—is it familiar to either of you?"

"It is one of a collection of curios that Mr Mason picked up during a tour of Italy," replied Veraccio. "They are kept in a glass case in the library."

A swift flush mounted to his cheeks as he saw the significance of this statement. The Chief Inspector made no sign, however, but asked: "Did you notice the stiletto was missing this evening?"

"Yes," was the reply. "I knew it was not there, for I took it away myself."

"When and for what purpose?"

"This morning, just as I was preparing to go out to the Post Office. I was collecting the letters from the library, when Mr Mason called to me to bring the stiletto to him. He was in his room, holding his personal letters. I assumed he wished to use the blade as a paper-knife."

"You left it with him?"

"He told me to put it on his dressing-table, which I did."

"And it was not returned to the case later?"

Veraccio shrugged.

"I cannot suppose it was. I did not happen to notice."

In the ensuing pause, a convulsive sob broke from Veronica Mason, and M'Phinney turned quickly and sympathetically to her.

"Forgive us, Mrs Mason. I am sorry this ordeal had to come on top of your bereavement. Perhaps you would like to lie down for a time."

Incriminating fingerprints on the Italian stiletto!

She nodded dumbly and made her way out of the room. The photographers having finished, the body had been removed. Nevertheless, the girl shuddered as she passed the foot of the stairs.

The Secretary's Story

M'PHINNEY collected the reports of his men in the hall, and returned to the morning-room. His manner was more brusque.

"Now, Mr Veraccio, you may want to expand your statement. My men have brought more facts to light, and it is my duty to point out that you need not speak without legal advice, unless you wish."

"I have nothing to hide, Inspector," broke in Veraccio quickly. "I do realise that things look black against me, but the truth must come out."

"Then," went on M'Phinney, "the facts so far are these. Of the domestic staff, only two are resident, and this was their evening off. The house was empty but for Mr and Mrs Mason and yourself. Mason was alive at two minutes to eight, when he passed the library door. One minute later he was dead, killed by a stab wound from a stiletto which, as the angle of entry shows, was thrown from above—a stiletto which, my men tell me, bears only one set of fingerprints—yours, Mr Veraccio!"

"No, no," burst out the secretary. "I did not kill him. Maybe I have wished him dead, but that is a different thing from killing. I could never kill, never!"

"You were not on good terms

with your employer, then?" queried M'Phinney.

Veraccio glared at him for a moment, then suddenly collapsed in a chair, looking utterly defeated.

"You will dig it all out, anyway, will you not?" he muttered. "I hated Hugo Mason. Who would not, when they lived under his roof and saw the way he treated his wife? How he would sneer at her and taunt her with her youth and lack of what he called sophistication. How he humiliated her in public by his bad behaviour. And when he was drunk——"

"Then it was on account of his wife that you hated him?" broke in M'Phinney. "Not because of any of his actions to yourself?"

"Oh, he disliked me. Sometimes I could make Veronica forget her trouble and laugh. He did not like that. He did not like her to be happy."

"You have nothing more to add to your statement?"

Dully the Italian shook his head.

Detailing a man to keep an eye on Veraccio, M'Phinney and Hawke moved into the hall. There, a policeman waited with a message for the Chief Inspector that Mrs Mason would like to speak to him. As he went up the stairs he passed Tommy Burke, who was descending.

"Well, Tommy," queried Hawke, "have you traced our blue silk?"

"Yes, Guv'nor," nodded Tommy. "It came from a silk tassel on the blind cord of that window."

He pointed upstairs to the long window on the landing which faced them.

"H'm, yes," mused Hawke. "Mrs

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Mason told us he came down twirling his cane. I suppose he caught the tassel with the ragged edge of the ferrule as he reached the landing. About the time he was hit, in fact, for if the dagger was thrown from above, it could only be from the top of the stairs, and must have been before he leaned over the balustrade. That seems to corroborate Mrs Mason's story."

As they looked upwards they saw M'Phinney descend the first flight and closely examine the stairs and balustrade of the bottom one. Then he joined the two in the hall.

"Mrs Mason thought fit to confess to the crime," M'Phinney told them. "She said her husband was alive when he slid down the balustrade. The stiletto was on the hall table, and she stabbed him with it as he lay after his fall. She was taken aback when I mentioned the prints, but said Tony must have made them when he examined the body to see if Mason were dead, or perhaps to shield her."

Hawke looked thoughtful.

"It is impossible?" he asked.

The Chief Inspector nodded.

"There are fresh bloodstains in various places on the balustrade and even the carpet of the bottom flight. That shows he was hit on the landing. So, unless she's lying about being in the hall when he was killed, she couldn't have done it. I think it's just an attempt to shield Veraccio."

"You know, I'm not satisfied, Mac," declared Hawke. "The simple explanation is that when Veraccio heard Mason pass the library, he took the dagger from its

case, slipped to the top of the stairs, and threw it to hit Mason just as he reached the landing. Mason slid down, and Veraccio returned to the library to await developments."

He sighed.

"But it won't do. That secretary is no fool. He must have known suspicion would inevitably point to him."

"Of course," interrupted Tommy, "he might have done it in a sudden fit of passion when he heard Mason singing, and realised he'd been drinking again."

"True, youngster, but in that case, would he ring the police at once? There was no one in the house but himself and Mrs Mason. She, as M'Phinney knows, would go much further than perjury to save his skin. Why, then, didn't they rig up an alibi, or even mess up the evidence a bit? Either course would have been simple. Why leave everything pointing so clearly to Veraccio's guilt? It doesn't make sense."

Sombrely the detective gazed up at the landing. Another thought struck him.

"Something else doesn't fit, Mac," he said. "This staircase turns left on the way down. Mason's back would be to the top as he descended, and on the landing he would turn his left side towards the top. Yet the stiletto was in the right side of his neck. Unless he accompanied his song with a pirouette, he couldn't have been hit from the stairhead."

This put a fresh complexion on the matter.

"I suppose he might have turned

The deadly contraption by the staircase window

round for some reason," suggested M'Phinney. "Perhaps Veraccio called to him, hoping to catch him in the throat and rig it to look like suicide."

He did not sound very convinced, and, as Tommy pointed out, if the deed had been calculated that way, it was unlikely the evidence would have been left as it was.

Strange Justice!

DIXON HAWKE meanwhile had ascended to the landing, and was standing in the position the dead man must have occupied when he was hit. Carefully he looked around him, measuring with his eye the angle from the top of the stairs. Then he stepped to the landing window. Sensing his suppressed excitement, the two in the hall were quickly at his side.

"Bring up a chair, Tommy!" snapped Hawke. "We've been looking at this case from the wrong angle—literally."

Mounting the chair, he made a swift examination of the blind fittings and stepped down, signalling M'Phinney to take his place. Tommy fidgeted impatiently.

"What's up?" he asked. "Besides the blind, which is half-down anyway."

"Exactly," replied Hawke. "That's how Hugo Mason was killed. You'll see in a moment a very neat little contraption consisting of a strong, steel spring which was held back by a lever pivoted in the centre and attached to the blind cord. You can see how the stiletto was affixed—rather on the

bow-and-arrow principle. When the blind cord was pulled it released the spring, which sent the dagger straight to its mark. And the cord was pulled when Mason's cane-ferrule caught it on his way downstairs."

M'Phinney shook his head, frowning.

"Hold on, Hawke!" he protested. "No murderer could bank on Mason's cane catching the blind cord."

"Oh, it obviously wasn't intended to happen that way," answered Hawke, "nor at that time."

"Nor maybe even to that victim," cut in Tommy.

"And," concluded the Yard man gloomily, "anyone in the wide world might have done it and have a dozen watertight alibis."

"It's not so bad as that, Mac," declared Hawke. "Whoever was meant to pull down that blind to-night was the intended victim."

"Let's have another go at friend Veraccio," suggested M'Phinney.

They found him as they had left him, slumped in a chair in the morning-room.

"I'd like to know a little about the routine of the household," began the Chief Inspector. "For instance, who locks up at night?"

"Mrs Mason, as a rule, if we are late in retiring. Otherwise one of the maids."

"H'm. And in summer I suppose blinds are left up?"

The question was seemingly casual and the Italian showed no surprise at it. He shrugged.

"No one worries about them—except the landing window one."

The Knife from Nowhere!

"Why the exception?"

"There is a valuable oil of Mr Mason's father hanging on the staircase wall. The morning sun comes strongly in at that window, and would damage the picture."

There was a tense silence in the room as M'Phinney asked:

"Who draws that blind, and when?"

"I do," answered Veraccio. "Mr Mason was most particular that I should attend to it personally, as domestics are inclined to be forgetful. It was a rule that I draw that blind every evening at nine, when I brought the letters for the morning post down to the hall."

A uniformed constable interrupted here to tell M'Phinney the maids had returned from their evening out. With suspicious alacrity Dixon Hawke offered to interview them. He was gone only a few minutes, and on his return to the morning-room found that M'Phinney had dismissed Veraccio.

"It seems that the Italian may have been the intended victim," began the Chief Inspector, "but your murderer could just be anyone. Presumably the method of killing was to ensure a perfect alibi."

Hawke nodded.

"Not only that," he observed quietly, "but it was intended to look like suicide. Once more it is a question of angles. Had Veraccio pulled down that blind, the stiletto would have entered his throat. The landing being so narrow, the force of the impact would have sent him downstairs, and we'd have found him lying in the hall, dead of an

apparently self-administered wound with his own prints on the weapon. He would have been alone in the house. It's diabolically clever—and you'll never hang the man who planned it."

M'Phinney looked stunned for a moment.

"By George, Hawke, talk about Nemesis!"

Hawke shrugged his shoulders.

"The evils of drink," he observed. "Mason caused Veraccio to handle the dagger this morning. The maids tell me that when Veraccio and Mrs Mason left this morning Mason came to the kitchen for screwdrivers."

"He told them he was carrying out a repair to the hall door, and not to come through it till he was finished. That kept them out of the way. Needless to say, the hall door has not been touched. He and his wife were going to this reception, and at nine o'clock would have had a cast-iron alibi."

"Motive — jealousy," commented M'Phinney.

"Yes. He didn't love his wife, but no one else was allowed to, either. I imagine she would have had the honour of finding the body."

The Chief Inspector nodded.

"What was the clue you mentioned earlier—the one that was staring us in the face?"

"The gadget itself," answered his companion. "There was time before our arrival to remove it, and it would have been an obvious and wise precaution, had Mrs Mason or Veraccio been the culprit. The only man who had no opportunity to do so was the corpse."



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No. 713. Thanks very much for the excellent lessons in "Klavarskribo," which I have enjoyed very much indeed. After twelve lessons I am able to play **Handel's Larga** without difficulty. People who have been playing from the old method for three years and even longer were amazed when I told them that I had achieved this result after only 12 lessons in "Klavarskribo."—Mr J. N. B. D.

No. 645. Your method is splendid. Everything you write about the lessons is so true. Both the oldest and the youngest people are able to follow the lessons. I never could have believed that such a pleasant and at the same time—so simple a method existed. In earlier years I used to practise according to the old method, but I never had any success.—Mr N.

No. 241. For a short period I had organ lessons according to the old method, but I had to be dragged to the organ. Now that I am taking piano lessons according to the "Klavarskribo" method, I have always to be dragged away from the piano. As soon as I catch sight of the piano I have a wish to play, and sometimes I play for hours at a stretch until I am compelled to stop.—Mr W. V.

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